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February 15, 2017

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully

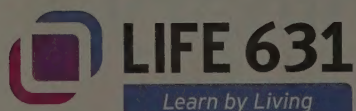
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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

Habit forming

I hated math as a kid. Arithmetic practically made me ill. Story problems were my arch-enemy. Neither the logic nor the joy that others derived from math class made any sense to me. I loved textbooks that had the answers in the back, which meant I could try to work in reverse and figure out how to arrive at those answers. The problem with that strategy was that it was devoid of discipline and absent of methodology. One doesn't really learn math without discovering disciplined habits that move one from problem to answer.

Most of the really important things we do in life we do according to habits acquired over long stretches of time. A good life imbued with virtue is one shaped by intentional acts that are too precious to be left to haphazard behavior. Virtues don't just magically appear in us the day someone cuts our umbilical cord. We learn generosity, reverence, and love over time, and we learn qualities such as these from other people. Transforming the virtues we observe into personal disciplines that become ingrained habits—this is what shapes an interior self and external being worth knowing. It's what readies us for serving the Lord most capably.

Several articles in this issue point to the changing landscape of seminary education. Formal training for pastoral ministry is moving closer and closer to the congregational setting. This has obvious merit, though practical learning in any profession can never fully replace the intellectual discovery that comes through rigorous training of the mind. Seminaries appear particularly good at delivering content, though by nature less well equipped to grow disci-

plined habits and faithful practices in emerging pastors.

This opportunity to help young pastors foster sound personal habits and practices is why our congregation has been hosting a pastoral residency program for the last 12 years. What I seek to grow in others and in myself, through this program, is not a theory of pastoral ministry but rather a way of life—a way of life highly conducive to delighting in God and other people in a daily way. This life comes only through diligent practice. The best pastors I know are those who possess a desire to learn from others. They have a teachable spirit, a thirst for growing virtue, and a lifelong eagerness for feedback. The least admirable pastors I know are those determined to appear in command, display unwarranted amounts of self-assurance, and exercise authority they believe is owed the office.

Simply *wanting* to be good at ministry is like wanting to be good at driving, or marriage, or basketball. Fulfilling the desire requires persistent training. Only through disciplined focus on often mundane routines do we acquire habits and practices that end up shaping the people we are within. How will pastors help others enjoy the Christian life if they aren't themselves grounded in unself-conscious habits and practices of beautiful variety?

The great cellist Pablo Casals was famous for practicing musical scales several hours a day for his entire life. When asked why he still practiced these at age 93, Casals responded, "Because I think I'm making progress. . . . It's not a mechanical routine but something essential to my life." We become better people (and better pastors) when we discover that the essence of life is comprised of what we once presumed were only mechanical routines.

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The CHRISTIAN CENTURY (ISSN 0009-5281) is published biweekly at 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago IL 60603. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Product (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1406523. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers, NY 10920-0429.



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LETTERS

Being trans

What beautiful reflections! I'm grateful for the presence of these (and many other) trans and gender nonconforming individuals in the church ("Trans identity and the life of faith," Jan. 18). They speak in clear, fresh, and vital ways about how God's love comes into this world and to each one of us. I'm happy they are in church not because they fit or confirm my preconceived notions of a welcoming and loving God, but because in their concrete witness they proclaim to me and teach me about the depths of the riches of God's welcome.

*Joel Bergeland
Minneapolis, Minn.*

So should we spring the trap on Jesus and ask, "And in the resurrection, will they be male or female?" Christians ought not honor the mind-body duality that allows persons with a male or female body to decide they are other. If I identify as a 78-year-old, do I get to collect my Social Security benefits now? If I identify as an African American, may I get special consideration on government contracts that give preference to minorities?

Amassing narratives doesn't suddenly make the story true. Nonetheless, love seeks the best interest of the other. How then shall I love thee?

*David Brockhoff
Spring Hill, Fla.*

The words "Being trans" on the January 18 cover inescapably assert ontology over subjectivity. Yet how much of the language of the various testimonies is subjective, with no biological science asserted or cross-examined. Where is the critical thinking here? And where is the exegesis of the ontology of the image of God in Genesis 1-2, prior to the advent of broken trust and human sin, and thus the biblical founda-

tion to address any person's struggle or suffering?

*John C. Rankin
West Simsbury, Conn.*

Truth telling . . .

Iam very grateful for the timely, nuanced, and theologically alert reflection on truth telling, or better, on lives and communities grounded in, and seeking to practice, truthfulness ("Living truthfully," Jan. 4). In these days, when Christian folk in some quarters are giving voice to the urgency of a new Christian resistance—meaning confessionally centered opposition to some of the most glaring policy priorities (such as they are) of the newly elected president—it will be important to infuse that resistance (by itself, an oppositional term) with positive, generative, value-rich descriptions of what that means.

*Bill Bixby
Oak Park, Ill.*

Bread of heaven . . .

Melissa Florer-Bixler's "Holy Crumbs" (Jan. 4) took me back to my childhood, when we dined, engaged in a foot washing service, and then took communion. We called the bread and juice "the elements." We were taught not that the elements were sacred but that they were to be treated with respect.

However, after the service ended we unbaptized children were turned loose. We raided the tables and ate as much of the communion bread as we could. This may seem like sacrilege to many high church Christians; to us it was bread from heaven.

During those times I certainly was not doing pious thinking, but that experience has helped sustain my faith for many decades.

*Floyd E. Bantz,
Lancaster, Pa.*

Doing something on climate

February 15, 2017

A couple of days before Donald Trump was inaugurated, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced that in 2016 the earth had experienced the hottest temperatures on record—for the third year in a row. While environmental activists and policymakers around the globe are bracing for the impact of melting ice, rising oceans, devastating heat waves, and associated natural disasters, Trump has vowed to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change, increase fossil fuel extraction, and curb the power of the Environmental Protection Agency. His cabinet is composed of skeptics of climate change and proponents of the fossil fuel industry. His White House website quickly erased Obama's statement on climate change. Over the next four years, leadership on climate change is not likely to come from the federal government.

But there are bright spots in the struggle, perhaps most of all in California, where last year Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation that requires the state to reduce carbon emissions to 40 percent of 1990 levels by 2030, with an ultimate goal of an 80 percent reduction by 2050. The state is on track to reach this goal through a remarkable mix of government regulation and industry innovation.

On the government side, new construction rules require new homes by 2020 to meet energy-saving standards for insulation, tightly sealed windows and doors, and solar and wind capacity. On the industry side, California leads the nation in developing electric cars and high-speed trains. California has started down this path while increasing its economic output and outpacing the rest of the country in job growth. There are now more jobs in the solar industry than in the rest of California's utilities combined.

California is just one state, but it has an outsized impact, with 38 million people and the sixth-largest economy in the world. In addition, California has signed over 200 memorandums of understanding with states, provinces, and countries, including China, Mexico, and Canada. Speaking at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union in December, Brown struck a combative tone in defending the state's initiatives. "We've got the scientists, we've got the lawyers, and we're ready to fight. We're ready to defend. California is no stranger to this fight."

California is setting an example, showing how much of a role entities other than the federal government can play. The future of climate change action will necessarily involve a broad range of participants—including state and local governments, corporations, advocacy groups (like 350.org), and consumers. Together these entities are already pushing the country toward both technological innovation and constructive regulation.

The global goal articulated by the Paris agreement is to hold the increase in the global average temperature (above preindustrial levels) to below 2° Celsius. It's an ambitious goal. While there may not be much support for it in Washington these days, the movement is not going away.

Outside Washington, progress is being made to fight climate change.

CENTURY marks

LOVE STORY: Actor Andrew Garfield admits that films and books were his church as a youth; they created a place where he felt most safe and could be himself. To prepare to play the lead role in *Silence*, Martin Scorsese's movie about Jesuit missionaries in Japan, he asked Father James Martin, SJ, to help him work through the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. Garfield said his acting career prepared him for Ignatian prayer, which entails imagining oneself in biblical scenes so as to attain an interior knowledge of God. What most surprised him about the spiritual exercises was that it was "really easy . . . falling in love with Jesus Christ" (*America*, January 10).

SENSITIVITY TRAINING: Jamila Afghani is an Afghan woman who runs a gender-sensitivity training program for

imams. She contracted polio as a young child but was able to turn the disability into an advantage after a doctor persuaded her father to let her go to school. She eventually did master's level work in Islamic studies, learned Arabic, and concluded that Islam is not opposed to education in the way she had been taught at home. Afghani started literacy programs for women and then the sensitivity programs for clerics (*The Christian Science Monitor*, January 5).

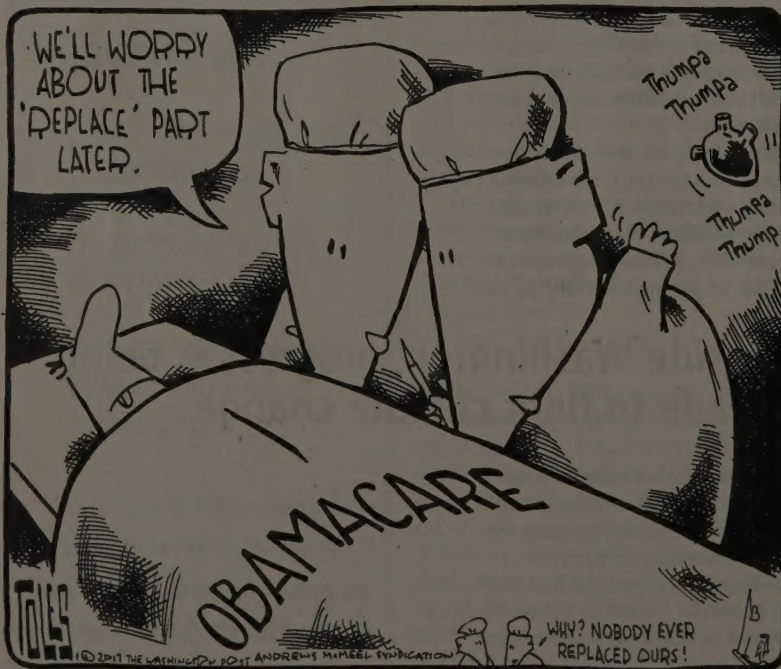
AWESOMENESS: Awe-inducing vastness has the potential of expanding our worldview and shrinking our ego, according to researchers who are studying the sense of awe. An analysis of 56 astronauts' memoirs, interviews, and oral histories revealed that their experiences led to an increased sense of spirituality and oneness with all people. Placing

people in a grove of large trees can evoke a sense of awe that makes people feel smaller yet more generous. Awe is the second most common reason for people to get goose bumps (the first is being cold) (*Atlantic*, January/February).

COMPANIONS: President Obama said reading books helped him keep his equilibrium and gave him the ability to slow down and to get into someone else's shoes. He said he found solace and support particularly in the writings of Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. Reading presidential biographies helped him to see that he wasn't dealing with uniquely difficult situations. He read some books for escape but said that even a work of science fiction like *The Three-Body Problem* or a novel like *The Underground Railroad* could give him a needed perspective (*New York Times*, January 16).

SANCTUARY: More than 800 congregations have declared themselves sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants—about double the number that had done so by Election Day. Leaders of the sanctuary movement say it picked up momentum in the days before Donald Trump's inauguration. Omar Suleiman, professor of Islamic studies at Southern Methodist University, is organizing an effort to call on mosques across the country to open their doors as sanctuaries. Clifton Mosque in the Cincinnati area announced that it would join the movement (RNS).

BORDERLINE CASES: A few Canadians were turned back at the border when they told U.S. customs officials that they were headed to Washington, D.C., or the women's march on the day after the presidential inauguration. At least one person who was denied entry has dual Canadian and American citizen-



ship. An Ontario couple was told that the protest march in the United States was none of their business and that Canada has enough problems of its own to worry about. U.S. customs officials said they were unable to discuss individual cases (CBC, January 20, and BBC, January 21).

BY THE NUMBERS: In the week following the November 2016 elections, the American Civil Liberties Union received \$7,200,000 in donations. In the week after the 2012 elections, it received \$27,806 in donations (*Harper's*, February).

CHANGE OF COURSE: American presidents have consistently discouraged Israel from establishing settlements in Palestinian territories, but that may change with the Trump administration. Some Jewish settlers were invited to Trump's inauguration, an unprecedented move. Also invited was Yehuda Glick, a Brooklyn-born member of the right-wing Likud Party, who lives in a West Bank settlement and thinks the two-state solution untenable. Previous American administrations have maintained communication with Maen Rashid Areikat, the top Palestinian diplomat based in Washington. Prior to the inauguration, Areikat said he had not received any overture from the Trump transition team (PRI, January 19).

REVERSAL: The U.S. Catholic hierarchy was one of the staunchest foes of President Obama's signature health-care law, nearly derailing its passage in 2010 over concerns about the funding of abortions. But last month the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops sent a letter to Congress warning it not to overturn the law without providing an immediate replacement that provides continuing coverage for the millions who have been insured under the Affordable Care Act. "We recognize that the law has brought about important gains in coverage, and those gains should be protected," the letter said. For those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, a repeal "would prove particularly devastating" (RNS).

SIMPLE CHANGE: Sometimes very simple steps can make a huge difference. Eight months after England imposed a

“The ultimate instrument of our unity is the patient grace of God, not the greatness of the nation state. We render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but it is in God we trust.”

— from the editors of the Jesuit magazine *America* (January 20), responding to President Trump's inaugural address which called for unity through allegiance to the nation

“You stood by as your precious parents were reduced to headlines. Your parents, who put you first and who not only showed you but gave you the world. As always, they will be rooting for you as you begin your next chapter. And so will we.”

— Barbara Bush and Jenna Bush Hager, in a letter to Malia and Sasha Obama as they were moving out of the White House (*Time*, January 12)

five-pence charge on single-use plastic bags, their use dropped by 85 percent. Marine life should benefit. The oceans are subjected to 8 billion tons of plastic waste each year (*Guardian*, January 23).

FAVORITE TEXTS: The YouVersion Bible app tracks which Bible verses are most often shared, bookmarked, or highlighted in different countries. In 2016 the most popular verse in Afghanistan and Israel was Zechariah 14:9: "The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name" (NIV). The favorite Bible verse worldwide in 2016 was Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who

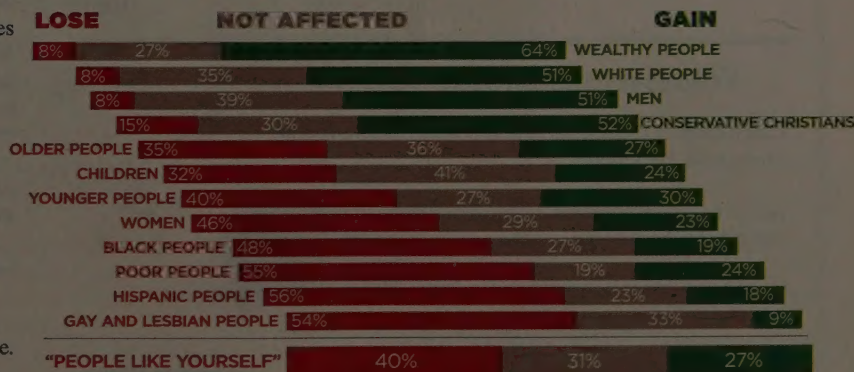
have been called according to his purpose" (*Christianity Today*, January 10).

BOX OFFICE HIT: Sunni Muslim clerics are incensed over a movie that has become a box office hit in Egypt. *Mawlana* ("The Preacher") tells the story of a very popular television preacher who struggles over the tension between his religious beliefs and the pressure he feels from the government that wants his support. The movie explores the tension between Muslims and Christians. In the climax, a young man blows up a church. Clerics critical of the movie say it paints a picture of establishment Islam in Egypt as unprincipled, and it comes at a bad time, when they are trying to battle Islamic extremism (Reuters).

WINNERS & LOSERS

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The public's view on which groups will most likely **lose** or **gain** influence in a Trump administration, according to a poll taken in early January



Watching *Hidden Figures* with my fourth-grader

Limits of a feel-good movie

by Lee Hull Moses

ON THE third snow day in a row, when the streets were clear enough for everything but school buses and my daughter had worked her way through two and a half Harry Potter books while sitting in my office, I gave up any pretense of trying to get work done. I took her to the movies.

We saw *Hidden Figures*, based on the true story of three African-American women who worked as scientists and mathematicians at NASA in the early days of the space program. The film's main characters—Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughan—are just three of the black women whose stories have been hidden behind those of the more famous (white, male) astronauts they helped launch into space. Johnson is amazing with numbers and can figure out any mathematical problem. Jackson becomes NASA's first black female engineer. Vaughan teaches herself how to write code so that she can program the brand new—and hilariously gigantic—IBM computer.

The film is chock-full of girl power. These are fierce, brilliant women making

their way in a profession that has no room for their gender or their skin color. They are sassy when it's called for, sneaky when there's no other choice, and smarter than anybody else in the room.

They also manage to have well-rounded lives beyond their jobs. The

doesn't really exist in the film. It's as if whoever edited the trailer could scarcely conceive of a movie about working women in which the primary conflict isn't career versus family.

The film itself knows better. It also understands something about vocation.

The film is full of girl power, but it gives a sanitized view of race relations in the 1960s.

movie understands that women can be more than one thing at once—parent, partner, professional—and in no particular hierarchical order. Only once does one of Johnson's children comment on her long working hours, and Johnson handles it with enough humor and grace to assure us that she is neither consumed with working-mom guilt nor neglectful of her family.

Notably, this single comment by Johnson's daughter makes it into the movie's trailer, implying a struggle that

These women are not just working to pay the bills; they're working because they like the work, they're good at it, and it's making a difference in the world. It's not just Jackson's dream to become an engineer; it's a calling, one she could hardly avoid if she tried.

Hidden Figures is about more than race, but it is, of course, also about race. The same PG rating that made it a perfect snow-day movie for my fourth-grader means that it offers a pretty sanitized look at the state of race relations in 1960s America. A side conversation about the firebombing of a freedom rider bus hints at the violent reality beyond the walls of NASA. In the mathematicians' workday, however, the biggest hardships seem to be mild condescension and separate bathrooms and coffee pots.

Not to make light of such things—segregated bathrooms are appallingly inhumane, and movies like this help

Whatever the birds were

Like a spirited theological colloquy between two people whose faith has failed,

two trees, alders, whipped drastic in the gust
that subsided so suddenly it seemed each had inhaled, and stilled.

Whatever the birds were that flitted back and forth between them then,
they made a silver seeming noise.

Christian Wiman

Lee Hull Moses is pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Greensboro, North Carolina. She is author of *More than Enough: Living Abundantly in a Culture of Excess* (Westminster John Knox Press).

remind us of our sinful past. But there is a danger in responding to such a film by congratulating ourselves on how far we've come. The plotlines all wrap up tidily, with each main character breaking through the color barrier. And throughout the film, we are expected to celebrate each small victory over prejudice. "At NASA," Kevin Costner's character says, after smashing the sign on the colored bathroom, "we all pee the same color." It's a good line, but as we've learned in the decades since desegregation became law, declaring racism over does not make it so.

The most telling moment in the film happens between Vaughan and her supervisor, a white woman who seems supportive but has blocked Vaughan's path to becoming a

supervisor herself. "You know, Dorothy," she says, "I really don't have anything against y'all."

Vaughan looks at her for a long moment. Then she says, "I know you probably believe that." The conversation takes place at the sink in the newly integrated women's room. It's a stark reminder that the problem of racism is far more complicated than lack of access to bathrooms, classrooms, and boardrooms.

This story about gender and race is set against the backdrop of the fast-growing space program. Every calculation these women do is designed to help propel an American beyond earth's atmosphere, something that has never been done before. As we're told more than once, the math needed to do this unthinkable feat didn't even exist yet; they're making it up as they go along. And what's not to love

about a good spaceflight story? We know from the history books that John Glenn made it back to earth after that first orbit. Still, I held my breath when his heat shield appeared to be failing, and I cheered when he splashed safely into the Atlantic.

We need a feel-good story about America right about now, and *Hidden Figures* serves well. We need stories that remind us that things once were worse and we made them better, that we can do impossible things, that we can be better than we are. We need to hear the stories that have been too long ignored. We need to be reminded that just because we don't know how to do something—shattering the glass ceiling, ending racism, or flying to the stars—doesn't mean that we shouldn't give it our very best.

CC

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CENTURY news

Fund supports historic congregations

Restoring a congregation with a historic sanctuary is not just a matter of repairing a building from the past. It's about energizing a church's mission into the future.

That vision is put forth by the leaders of the National Fund for Sacred Places and of the churches that have received grants for stewardship of their facilities. The fund was established as a partnership between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Partners for Sacred Places, an organization with headquarters in Philadelphia that works with historic congregations. Together they have received \$14 million through the Lilly Endowment, which they will distribute in matching grants of up to \$250,000 to congregations of various faith traditions during the next four years.

The initial 14 recipients are located across the United States. One is Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest African-American church in Chicago, which has hosted high-profile political figures and jazz and gospel musicians. It was a station on the Underground Railroad and one of its pews is in the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Quinn was once considered an endangered site by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. During the past decade the congregation has completed several phases of renovation, and it plans to put the matching grant from the national fund toward sealing and restoring the church's stained-glass windows.

James Moody, pastor of Quinn Chapel, sees three dimensions to restoration. First is "restoring the relationship of the peo-

ple to God," the second, "restoring the relationship of the congregation to the community," he said. In Quinn Chapel's neighborhood that has meant working to reduce drug trafficking and prostitution. In one instance, a person who had been addicted to heroin got clean, stayed out of prison, and became a church usher.

The third dimension is restoring the church's facilities and the blocks around it. "What has happened has changed not only the way people in this area see themselves but also the way people on the outside see the value this area holds," he said.

When Moody became pastor in 2002,

the congregation had 35 worshippers. Now it has 400 and is a church that "truly works together," said John Gay, the architect who won the bidding for the building restoration years ago—and was inspired to join the church.

Corlis Moody, who is married to Pastor Moody, has written grant applications for each phase of renovations.

Even in the midst of the repair work, Quinn Chapel's building is open seven days a week. "You cannot bring your historical site into today if you do not open your doors," she said. "Life produces life."

Corlis Moody attended training on capital campaigns that gathered local



SACRED AND HISTORIC: Quinn Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago, which dates back to 1844, had a mural painted in 1904 showing Jesus as a black man, which was unusual at the time, said Corlis Moody (bottom left), who has been the point person for restoration projects in the building. The church purchased its pipe organ from the German exposition at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Quinn Chapel was among the recipients of a matching grant from a new fund for historic congregations.

congregational leaders to learn from each other about the blessings and burdens of having historic status.

"We believe in preservation," Corlis Moody said. "But it limits what you can do to your property."

Chad Martin, director of the National Fund for Sacred Places, said the fund is accepting letters of interest until May 1 for its next round of grants (there is a form available at fundforsacredplaces.org). They are looking for buildings that have architectural significance or some other noteworthy feature and that are still owned by a congregation or closely related nonprofit.

The size of the congregation does not matter as long as it is willing to form partnerships in order to raise its share of the funds.

Partners for Sacred Places has been operating for 30 years "in the midst of the landscape witnessing churches closing," a landscape that mainline congregations know well, Martin said. "It will be really critical in the coming years to be discerning and savvy about which congregations have prospects for continuing into the future."

Partners for Sacred Spaces offers strategic planning and discernment for congregations, even if that leads toward a decision to close. At that point, it's still possible to create a plan for keeping the space for purposes in line with the church's mission, rather than having it get "snapped up by developers before there's a chance for community input," Martin said.

The fund expects to give grants to 50 congregations in its first four years and hopes to continue work beyond that, Martin said.

Tuomi Forrest, executive vice president for Partners for Sacred Places, said the organization intends to provide some level of assistance to every applicant to the national fund, whether that's advice, training, or referrals.

Consulting and training are at the core of the organization's work, Forrest said. It has offered programs to nearly 1,000 congregations to help them make a plan for community outreach, building repair, and fund-raising.

The national fund is about more than giving money, Forrest said. "It's

really us working hand-in-hand with congregational leaders to ensure that they have successful capital projects, but also that the congregation is sustained and strengthened."

Partners for Sacred Spaces collaborated with the University of Pennsylvania in a scholarly study that showed that "the average urban church or synagogue contributes \$1.7 million in value to its community each year." And nearly 90 percent of the people who benefit from programs based in a congregation's building are not members of that congregation.

"These places have a civic value, they have a public value," said Robert Jaeger, president of Partners for Sacred Places. "It's so important in this era to say to our government leaders, 'These places have value for everybody. So please do not see them just as Methodist or Presbyterian or Jewish or Catholic. It's really a place that serves us all.'"

Partners for Sacred Places sits down with church leaders to look at the full array of options for finding funding for their building. Some of those are "low-hanging fruit" such as sharing more space with nonprofits, but may also include the possibility of selling air rights, the vertical space above a property, which can be "enormously complicated," in Jaeger's view. Air rights have also proved controversial when sold to make way for luxury condominiums.

Trinity United Methodist Church in Idaho Falls, Idaho, which was founded by 19th-century Methodist missionaries to the Rockies, caught the eye of the national fund after applying for a state-level heritage grant. As it raised money for one of the initial grants from the national fund for adding bathrooms and restoring the masonry and roof of the building, it received \$5,000 for planning and an architectural assessment.

The church hosts free concerts and events in partnership with the Museum of Idaho, which doesn't have an auditorium. The building is seen as being open for secular activities, which isn't true of many churches in their area, said Ruth Marsh, the pastor.

"The room was built with great acoustics, since one hundred years ago they didn't have ways to amplify as we

do now," Marsh said. "More and more these spaces with great acoustics are going away."

Nancy Stewart, chair of the church's board of trustees, who is also attending the Partners for Sacred Places Capital Funds Campaign 101 course, said, "This is an opportunity, but we have to go beyond our comfort level to find the people to donate."

Receiving the grant from the national fund has been an opportunity for the congregation to move from patching and mending the building to focusing on long-term vision, Marsh said. "One of the things that's really hard to quantify is how much getting connected to Sacred Places has been a hope-filled experience for this congregation."

Her two years as pastor have been filled with conversations about the future. The congregation has considered selling the building and constructing a new one elsewhere. The grant "helps the congregation to be healthy and grow . . . We're doing the building work to serve the community." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, the CHRISTIAN CENTURY

In black Charleston, a struggle to find both justice and mercy

Charleston variety store owner Leon Fields pondered the question of whether Dylann Roof should die for his unthinkable crimes or have his life spared as an act of grace.

Fields has witnessed all sorts of senseless violence in his neighborhood. Thoughts of vengeance, forgiveness, and God's judgment aren't theoretical here, but viscerally real, said the African-American businessman.

"I remember when my sister was murdered," Fields said. "I wished ill on a lot of people, but then found myself feeling sorry for them when life got the better of them."

His range of thoughts is part of what Fields summarizes as the deeply "mixed emotions" in Charleston's black community, which was attacked in its most



MERCY AND JUSTICE: *Leon Fields (left) cuts James Greene's hair at his barbershop and variety store in Charleston, South Carolina, where among Fields's regular customers was Ethel Lance, one of the Mother Emanuel Nine. Some relatives of those killed have offered forgiveness to Dylann Roof, who has been sentenced to death for the murders, while other African Americans in Charleston have struggled with determining the most just punishment.*

sacred space on June 17, 2015, when Roof killed nine people ranging from 26 to 89 years old at a Bible study at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Ethel Lance, one of those murdered that day, was a frequent customer at Fields's shop. She was a dynamo church lady, he said, always running from one errand to the next, often on behalf of Mother Emanuel.

A jury convicted Roof and sentenced him in January to be executed—a decision the majority of white Charlestonians agreed with. Yet many in the city's black community—including many of the victims' family members—took a different view. They called for mercy and challenged the idea that forgiveness excuses white supremacist behavior and downplays black humanity.

"I forgive you, and have mercy on your soul," Nadine Collier, the daughter of victim Ethel Lance, told Roof in a courtroom statement. "You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. If God forgives you, I forgive you."

Despite his sense that Roof needs to pay the ultimate price for his crime,

Fields worries that killing the young white supremacist could make him a martyr. He shudders at the thought, mulling over the question of whether compassion can, in fact, lead to grace and perhaps to meaningful change.

At the very least, he said, the families of the Emanuel Nine "lit a lamp for us to follow."

To Sam Holmes, a Charleston-born Vietnam veteran, Roof's hatred is a reminder that the past—when white Charlestonians feared that slaves would rise up and overthrow them—still lingers.

"Listen, humanity is in bad shape, and it's not just an American problem but a world problem," Holmes said. "Forgiveness in this way is a way of making things better. To have him live and allow him the time to change his mind" allows both punishment and redemption.

Leaders of the 201-year-old national AME denomination had urged the jury to spare Roof's life.

"There lingers the unmistakable need for this nation to move beyond guilt or shame about racial injustice in America to action that will eradicate its consequences and its genesis from our hearts," Bishop Frank Reid III said in a statement. "That means being open for a cure from unbearable pain, and willingness to bind our wounds to forgive offenders and offer a second chance."

To be sure, the push to forgive Roof—who has remained unrepentant and voiced irritation during the trial at having to listen to so much testimony on behalf of his victims—is complex and far from unanimous.

During a break in the court proceedings, Esther Lance, who is also Ethel Lance's daughter, noted that she hasn't spoken to her sister, Nadine Collier, for nearly a year, even though they've both been in the same courtroom. The divide is over Collier's willingness to forgive her mother's killer.

"If [Roof] lives, his momma and daddy get to come see him," says Esther



Sam Holmes

Lance. "I can't ever see my momma again. The last time I saw her she said, 'I'll come back tonight to kiss the grands.' But she never came back, and we'll never see her again."

Mark Tyler, the senior pastor of Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, noted some additional facets in that struggle with forgiveness.

"It's fair to say that what makes this even more difficult is that it occurred in a place we consider sacred and holy, and among people who actually were doing what the church is intended to do, who welcomed a stranger who in turn took advantage of their kindness in the worst possible way," Tyler said. "Every person who does something has to understand that even if God forgives you, there is still a certain set of consequences that you unleash because of the thing that you've done." —Patrik Jonsson, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Army now allows soldiers to wear turbans, beards, and headscarves

New army regulations will allow Sikh and Muslim soldiers to wear turbans, beards, and hijabs—the headscarves worn by some Muslim women—under most circumstances.

"Based on the successful examples of soldiers currently serving with these accommodations, I have determined that brigade-level commanders may approve requests for these accommodations," wrote Secretary of the Army Eric K. Fanning in a memo.

In March 2016, the army concluded that permitting beards for medical reasons but banning them for religious reasons is a discriminatory bar to service for Sikhs, who are forbidden by their faith to cut their hair and beards.

With that decision, Capt. Simratpal Singh, a West Point graduate and Bronze Star Medal recipient, was the first to win army approval to continue on active duty while maintaining his religiously mandated beard and turban.

Harsimran Kaur, legal director for the

Sikh Coalition, which serves as cocounsel for Singh with the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, hailed the decision but said more work is needed.

"While we still seek a permanent policy change that enables all religious

minorities to freely serve without exception," Kaur said in a statement, "we are pleased with the progress that this new policy represents for religious tolerance and diversity by our nation's largest employer."

Soldiers will not be granted approval for accommodations if a commander determines "the request is not based on a sincerely held religious belief," the memo states. And the accommodation can be denied if there is a "specific, con-

After 500 years, a new synagogue opens in Sicily

MORE THAN 500 years after the Jews were expelled from Sicily, a tiny Jewish community will open its first synagogue in the island's capital city of Palermo.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Palermo transferred a chapel to the Jewish community. That chapel, the Oratory of Santa Maria al Sabato, was built above the ruins of the Great Synagogue which once stood in the center of Palermo.

The archbishop of Palermo, Corrado Lorefice, described the initiative as a "gesture of hope" designed to build dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

The Sicilian Institute of Jewish Studies and a Jerusalem-based organization, Shavei Israel, had requested the transfer.

"It is with great joy that we have responded to this request to have a place of study and worship for the Palermo Jewish community," Lorefice said in a statement. "This transfer is the product of a genuine friendship and ongoing dialogue between the church and Palermo's Jewish community."

The ceremony took place on the anniversary of the decree that demanded the expulsion of Jews from Sicily during the Spanish Inquisition—January 12, 1493. At that time Sicily was ruled by Spain.

Noemi Di Segni, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, said, "It is a gesture that will recover centuries of history."

Shavei Israel, which is committed to rebuilding Jewish communities around the world and reinforcing their links with Israel, hopes the Palermo synagogue will revitalize the local community.

"Ever since I learned about Sicily's history, my goal has been to lay the groundwork for the establishment of

the first Jewish community in Palermo in more than five centuries," said Michael Freund, founder and chairman of Shavei Israel. "This is something that would have been unthinkable 50 or 100 years ago. I am grateful to the archbishop of Palermo for having the vision and courage to make such a grand gesture of reconciliation."

Pinhas Punturello, the former chief rabbi of Naples, will oversee the synagogue, which will include a study center (Beit Midrash) and a Jewish heritage center.

Jews have had a presence in Sicily for more than 1,400 years. Some scholars believe they were brought to the island as slaves after the capture of Jerusalem in the first century. They suffered forced conversions and systematic persecution over the centuries,

culminating in the decree issued in 1493 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Estimates for the Jewish population of Sicily at that time run between 37,000 and 50,000.

Shavei Israel says it has been working with a number of Sicilians descended from Iberians whose ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism in the 14th and 15th centuries yet preserved Jewish traditions and are now rediscovering their heritage.

"It is a miracle that after more than 500 years there are still people in Sicily who proudly cling to their Jewish roots," Freund said. "It is testimony to the fact that neither the expulsion nor the Inquisition was able to extinguish the eternal Jewish spark in their hearts." —Josephine McKenna, Religion News Service



CENTURIES AFTER THE EDICT: Archbishop Corrado Lorefice of Palermo (left) meets Rabbi Pinhas Punturello, emissary to Sicily, Italy, for Shavei Israel, an organization opening a new synagogue in Palermo 500 years after Jewish people were expelled. On January 12, Lorefice transferred to the Jewish community a chapel built on the site where a synagogue once stood. Punturello will serve as its rabbi.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAVEI ISRAEL



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY: Captain Simratpal Singh, a West Point graduate and Bronze Star Medal recipient, in his military uniform with the approved religious accommodations of turban and beard for Sikh soldiers.

crete hazard . . . that cannot be mitigated by reasonable measures.”

After the memo’s release in January, previously accommodated soldiers received official approval that will continue through their careers, barring exceptions.

Fanning said the army is researching protective masks that can be used in hazardous environments by bearded soldiers. Until then, soldiers given these accommodations will not be permitted to attend military schools that require training on toxic chemical agents and may have to be clean-shaven in certain tactical situations.

The regulations note that hijabs should be “made of a subdued material in a color that closely resembles the assigned uniform.” A camouflage pattern can be used to match the combat uniform, and a soldier may be required to use flame-resistant material for the hijab.

The new directive includes illustrations detailing how the hijab should surround the face (not covering areas from the eyebrows to the chin) and the length of beards (two inches maximum). Beards longer than two inches “must be rolled and/or tied to achieve the required length,” according to the rules. —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

Iconography classes draw non-Orthodox in search of spiritual images

For Lara Neri, painting icons is a kind of prayer.

“It’s probably the most intense prayer that I do,” said Neri, a Byzantine Catholic from Dallas, referring to the dozens of hours she spent in a class at St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

The rise of such classes is a sign of growing interest in iconography, with short-term courses offered by experts.

Some students at St. Sophia said the process helps them become more patient, while others said it motivates them to concentrate on the needs of others.

Neri prayed for friends whom she had e-mailed in advance to ask if they had requests.

“While I’m painting, I’m praying to commit them and their needs to the heart of Mary and Jesus,” she said.

Theodoros Papadopoulos, who traveled from Greece to teach the class, recounted in the first day’s lesson the history and meaning of iconography.

“The Byzantine Orthodox iconography is not just an ‘art,’ it’s a sacred art,” he said. “It is not ‘painting,’ it’s theology. It is not ‘artistic expression,’ it is expectation of salvation.”

David Morgan, a religion scholar and art historian at Duke University, said the iconography tradition, which dates to the early centuries of Christianity, is designed to be distinct from more naturalistic art, which became more common in the Renaissance period.

The flatness of the image, its stillness, the large eyes of its figures and the often symmetrical style are all intentional ways of distinguishing between the ordinary world and a heavenly realm.

“The two-dimensional image denies three-dimensional presence,” he said. “It says the spirit is not about three dimensions. It’s about a reality that is revealed in the image, revealed in the holy scriptures, revealed in the sacrament, and it’s something that one needs to recognize as very special.”

The artistic process taught in iconography classes is bathed in prayer, both individual and corporate.

Before his history lesson, Papadopoulos began the workshop with an iconographer’s prayer. It was printed on a sheet for the students to read together before picking up their paintbrushes to “write” an image of the Christ child embracing his mother.

“Lord Jesus Christ, God of all, enlighten us, imbue the soul, the heart, the intellect of Your servant,” they prayed, standing before easels in a bright, window-filled room steps away from the sanctuary of St. Sophia.

Those involved say the growth in interest—from people of diverse traditions—has been building over the last couple of decades. Hundreds of intensive classes, costing several hundred dollars, are held across the country.

Lynette Hull, an iconographer with the Prosopeon School of Iconology, estimated that the school’s six-day intensive course has had more than 5,000 students in the past 25 years. Hull, a Presbyterian convert to Orthodoxy, thinks icons are attractive to people in an age that is image-driven.

“Every person sees hundreds of images a day, and the icon is beginning to



WRITING AN IMAGE: Iconographer Theodoros Papadopoulos works with students in his iconography class at St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, D.C., in June 2016. From left to right are Lara Neri of Dallas; Paula Magoulas of Washington, D.C.; and Helen Rainey of Washington, D.C.

speak to people in a way that it hasn't before," Hull said. "Not everybody who takes the class converts to Orthodoxy. However, it does speak to and lead people into a spiritual journey."

Within weeks of the St. Sophia class, Wesley Theological Seminary, a United Methodist-affiliated school, also held an iconography class taught by Philip Davydov, a Russian iconographer.

"We mostly do this in some circles which are non-Orthodox," Davydov said of the workshops, which are limited to 14 people to allow one-on-one interaction with each student. "Iconography is a special way to approach God and a special way to create instruments for others to approach God."

Hull said when she has traveled to Russia, she has met with some opposition to the notion of teaching non-Orthodox students about iconography.

"It tends to be people from outside of American culture who are more worried about it," she said. "For the Orthodox, the icon is a really holy thing, and if you're not Orthodox, how can you make an icon?"

But in the United States the broad interest is often welcomed.

"There is nothing wrong with a non-Orthodox person wanting to learn

iconography for their own spiritual discipline," said Aristidis Garinis, an iconographer and a priest serving at the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Flushing, New York.

But iconographers, he said, should be Orthodox church members designated by the church.

During the St. Sophia class, Papadopoulos guided his students in the basics of Byzantine icons, contrasting them with other forms of art. There is only height and width and no depth. Images of Jesus are larger than other figures because he is the most holy, he explained.

Gradually over the week, his students added the blue background and the bright gold paint of the haloes surrounding the heads of Mary and baby Jesus. They used egg tempera paints that Papadopoulos mixed from eggs he deftly separated.

Emmanuel Santos traveled from Guam after learning about the class online. He teaches geography and art at a Catholic boys' prep school.

"I have to learn and I have to unlearn a few things that I assumed [were] the right way to do it," he said.

Santos was already familiar with the icon that Papadopoulos chose for the class: Our Lady of Vladimir.

"There's a message through it, you

see," Santos said, pausing at his easel. "She looks at you so she's talking to you, but then she's holding on to her baby so then the message is 'Follow my baby.' And then the baby is looking at her face and so the message of the baby is 'Follow my mom. My mom is the best example of how to follow me.'" —Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

Anglicans in Burundi aim for 'one person, one tree'

In the Anglican Province of Burundi, the church has set a goal of planting 10 million trees—one for each person in the country—during the next five years.

Young people who are part of the Green Anglicans initiative in Central and Southern Africa have encouraged planting trees to mark occasions such as baptisms, confirmations, and weddings. The church of Burundi is taking that practice a step further with its effort to promote and maintain forests in its nation.

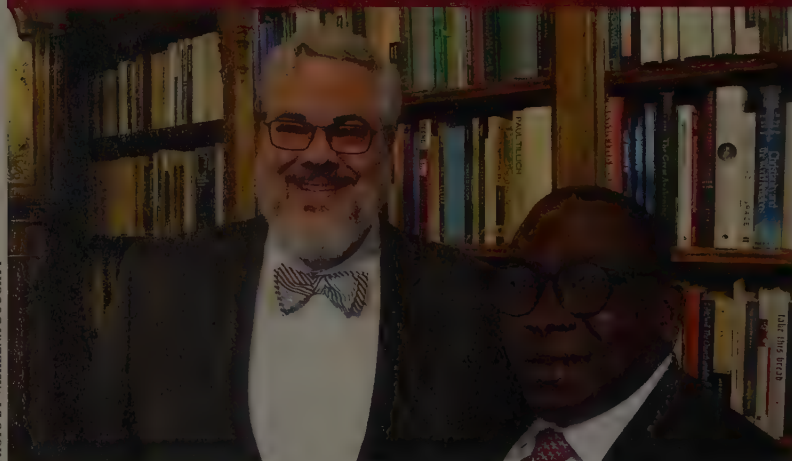
Such efforts can have multiple positive effects. A recent report showed that wildlife returned to a hillside in southern Burundi after a church-backed reforestation project. The initial aim was to provide security for a group of refugees who had settled on the hill after leaving a refugee camp in Tanzania. Because there were no trees on the hill, it suffered from erosion and was at risk of flooding from different rivers which flowed through the area.

A partnership between the Anglican Church of Burundi and local groups, with the support of the U.S.-based Episcopal Relief and Development, organized the digging of antierosion trenches and the planting of trees and grasses.

Another result of forestation is to send rainwater underground, creating new sources of water that is safe to drink. It also improves the fertility of the soil, increasing yields of maize and beans.

The church has set up nurseries in different provinces of Burundi and aims to plant the first 1 million trees, on public and private land, within the first year. —Anglican Communion News Service

PHOTO BY VASHEENA DOUGHTY



■ **Scott Black Johnston** (above left) and **Patrick O'Connor**, two Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastors whose congregations have ties to the Trump family, met with the president for 20 minutes days before his inauguration.

O'Connor is the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, Queens, where Donald Trump was baptized and confirmed. At his inauguration, Trump took the oath of office "on the Lincoln Bible and on the Bible his mother gave him when he graduated from the First Jamaica Sunday Church School in 1955," Johnston wrote in a public letter. Johnston's family was part of the same congregation in Queens, and he now serves Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Manhattan—"whose steeple the Trump family can see from their windows," Johnston noted.

"We believe we had a responsibility, as Christians, to offer prayer and honest counsel," Johnston wrote of the two pastors' offer to meet with Trump, which he accepted.

Johnston and O'Connor wrote in a commentary for CNN: "Some will criticize our visit. Some worry that we will be 'used.' But our worry, and the reason we wrote to Mr. Trump in the first place, is that the people who will interpret the American religious landscape to the new administration will not represent the breadth and depth of our country's faith communities."

Johnston noted in his letter on his

congregation's website, "We know that evangelical Christians and proponents of the prosperity gospel have had Mr. Trump's ear."

They called the congregations they serve—and that millions of Americans attend—"purple churches," moderate and progressive congregations, with economic and ethnic diversity as well, that are addressing national issues. "We vote in different ways, and yet, by the grace of God, we worship as one people. We believe that our unity depends not on lockstep agreement, but on the Christ who claims us and calls us to care for the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned."

Johnston and O'Connor offered to share the perspective of congregations such as theirs with Trump again at any time.

"We spent most of our brief time with Mr. Trump in prayer," Johnston wrote. "We asked for God's help in healing deep societal rifts and in stepping forward to create a nation that serves all of its people."

Johnston shared the full text of the prayer he and O'Connor gave on Fifth Avenue Presbyterian's website. It included these words: "Almighty God, all the people of the earth are yours. . . . Your will is done when governments are rightly administered, liberty is preserved, justice is decreed, dignity is assured, and care is extended to the most vulnerable of your children." —the **CHRISTIAN CENTURY** staff

■ **Macleod Baker Ochola II**, 84, a retired Anglican bishop in northern Uganda, is agitating for restorative justice in a region where the wounds of a brutal war unleashed by the Lord's Resistance Army persist.

Ochola has been responding to concerns that the modern court system may not deliver justice for the people who suffered in the complex conflict.



Led by Joseph Kony, the LRA rebels combined African mysticism and Christian fundamentalism in fighting to establish a theocracy. In the 1980s and '90s, the LRA abducted more than 60,000 children, sexually abusing them and forcing them to commit acts of violence against their own communities. By 2005, the LRA had killed more than 100,000 people and displaced 2.5 million.

Ochola buried the dead, including his wife, who was killed by a land mine, and his daughter, who died by suicide after being gang-raped by the rebels. At one point Ochola went into exile.

Yet he has walked with returning child soldiers.

"If there is no process of reconciliation, there is no healing, and if there is no healing there is no restoration and justice," Ochola said. "Healing and restoration brings transformation of life for those affected."

The International Criminal Court in The Hague indicted five top leaders of the rebel group in 2005. In December, the court began the trial of **Dominic Ongwen**, a 41-year-old former rebel commander who was abducted at age ten. He faces 70 charges, including murder, rape, torture, enslavement, and forced marriage. He is the first former child soldier to appear before the court.

"In the name of God, I deny all these charges," Ongwen said in court.

Ochola has been urging the court to reconsider the circumstances under



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

which children turned commanders were trapped in LRA captivity. Like many other cultural and religious leaders in Uganda, he stresses a traditional justice system called *mato oput* of the Acholi people of northern Uganda, the community most affected by the LRA conflict. Centered on forgiveness, it involves truth telling, compensation, and a ritual in which food is shared.

"It brings restoration to broken human relationships, transforms lives, and heals the hearts of those involved," Ochola said. "The court system, which is retributive, promotes polarization, alienating both sides."

Mato oput mirrors many of the forgiveness and reconciliation efforts central to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa and the Gacaca courts used in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide.

The LRA left northern Uganda in 2005 and is now believed to operate along the border region of the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The LRA is still at large and they are still fighting," Ochola said, "so we must continue with the work."

In 1997, Ochola was one of the founders of the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative, an interfaith organization that has sought to peacefully end the LRA insurgency. The initiative has worked on reconciliation and peaceful coexistence at the grassroots level, as well as trying to help the government and the LRA in a process of truth telling.

"This would involve accepting full responsibility and making public acknowledgment of what one has done," Ochola said.

One problem, he said, is the government's lack of political will to dismantle the LRA.

In the case of Ongwen, Ochola had hoped the former rebel would be brought to the community for truth telling. Since that did not happen, Ongwen will likely refuse to accept responsibility.

"As a victim, he continues to be punished twice," Ochola said.

Sheikh Musa Khalil, a northern Uganda Muslim leader and vice chairman of the religious leaders' initiative, backs Ochola, saying that with Ongwen, the traditional system could have achieved more.

"It mirrors what is in the Qur'an and Bible," said Khalil. "It's based on forgiveness. We feel he should have been brought to us."

The bishop does not agree with the view that when a child is abducted—as in the case of northern Uganda—he or she must take full responsibility in adulthood for any crimes committed while a captive.

"For northern Uganda," he said, "this is wrong because the children had their humanity destroyed." —Fredrick Nzwilli, Religion News Service

■ While the Iraqi conflict is not over, Archbishop Yousif Mirkis of Kirkuk is focused on how to heal his deeply divided country.

He called for a Marshall Plan for Iraq, referring to U.S. aid to Western Europe after World War II, during a visit to Paris to raise funds for an educational project he oversees. He is part of the Chaldean Church, which represents Catholics from Iraq and neighboring countries.

Through the project several hundred university students—Christians, Yazidis, and Muslims—study and live together.

He described another instance of interfaith reconciliation: the widow of a Japanese reporter who was kidnapped and killed in Fallujah funded the building of a hospital in the city.

"Instead of seeking revenge, she built a hospital and offered it to those who killed her husband," he said. "There's a lesson that should be repeated."

At the same time, Mirkis fears for children and youth growing up under the rule of the self-described Islamic state.

"What do we do with the millions who have been educated under it?" he asked.

Iraq's Christian population went from 1.5 million in 2003 to less than

300,000 last year, according to ADF International, a Vienna-based advocacy group. Some fear they may disappear.

Mirkis is not among them.

"For me, staying and resisting as a Christian minority is the right way," he said. —Elizabeth Bryant, Religion News Service

■ Eyob Yishak, who coordinates the peace office of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and teaches at Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Addis Ababa, was one of several leaders who gathered to talk about the role of religious groups in peace building.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LWF / IRIS J. BENESCH

The Lutheran World Federation and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches hosted a consultation, Faith-Based Engagement in Conflict Transformation, in December in Zimbabwe.

"The consultation reminded me once again of the importance of comprehensive and proper narratives of conflict histories and the healing of past wounds," Yishak said.

He sees the role of the church as including rebuilding social, economic, and political infrastructure that has been destroyed by violence, promoting fairness and justice, and speaking up for the marginalized.

"Peace building," he said, "requires speaking out against evil and challenging authorities whenever it seems necessary."

He has seen several achievements already in his peace-building work in Ethiopia, such as sports festivals held in 2013 and 2014 with youth from the Oromo and Gumuz ethnic groups, which have fought each other in the past.

In April 2016, he was among the planners of a peace and reconciliation conference.

"Conflicting ethnic groups, the Anywa and Nuer, were able to forgive each other and wash one another's feet," he said. "This was three months after the conflict, and it has contributed to the reduction of violence and mistrust between the two peoples." —Lutheran World Relief



PHOTO COURTESY OF HALTHEOR.ORG VIA CREATIVE COMMONS

LIVING The Word

March 1, Ash Wednesday

THE FIRST TIME I ever attended Ash Wednesday worship, I was in seminary. I was also a spiritual tourist.

I hadn't been raised in any faith. My call to ministry came when, curious about this thing called religion, I visited a Unitarian Universalist congregation. That was my first bout with spiritual tourism. I was 19 years old. I thought I was checking out religion to see if it might suit me. I figured this would take only a few hours on a single Sunday morning. Little did I know that God would hook me during the first five minutes of that worship service and keep me for 26 years (and counting).

Three years after that first visit, I was an aspirant for ordination in the Unitarian Universalist Association. But I was still curious about religion, and I had learned nothing about the risks of spiritual tourism. So I thought it would be interesting to visit King's Chapel in Boston on Ash Wednesday. King's Chapel was one of the only UU churches that offered an Ash Wednesday service; I had heard that they actually offered it with an authentic Christian liturgy. I was skeptical about Christianity. It seemed to me to be generally aligned with bigotry and the denial of scientific fact. But King's Chapel was Unitarian, and I was a Unitarian seminarian—one who remained curious about religion.

I'll never forget sitting in that old box pew, watching as people went up for the imposition of ashes. I realized something: this was a place where people told the truth. The liturgy made them do it. They told the truth about themselves—that they were mortal, that they were sinners, that they were scared.

I had been a lot of places in my first twentysome years of life. I had never been anywhere quite as truthful as that Ash Wednesday liturgy.

Jesus was new to me as a teacher, and I hadn't been raised to call him a friend. He was still pretty much a stranger. But his lesson stood out to me for its call to integrity, for its commonplace acceptance of a supernatural reality.

"When you fast," says Jesus in the Ash Wednesday Gospel reading, "put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Jesus doesn't want his followers to appear to be fasting so that they can gain the respect of a crowd. He wants them to actually fast, so they can gain a relationship with God.

I knew something about God—after all, God had caught me and led me into a life of faith—but I hadn't yet found a person whom I could trust to teach me more. It struck me that Jesus,

unlike a lot of his followers, might actually be trustworthy. I had to ask myself: What did all this mean for my life? Not long after that first visit I was back at King's Chapel, asking to be prepared for baptism.

In the 20 years since, I've learned a few things about Christians and the truth. We're great at telling the truth when the liturgy forces us to do so. We keep showing up to tell the truths the liturgy holds. We're still mortal. We're still sinners. We're still scared.

But when the liturgy doesn't force us to tell the truth, we're not as good at doing it. We fall into the trap of caring about appearances, seeking the respect of the crowd. We want our churches to look shiny and happy and pretty; we want shiny, happy, pretty young people to fill them. We want it to seem like God is breathing new life into us, like we are following Jesus with our whole hearts, like the Holy Spirit is working through us to make all things new. But we're often unwilling to take the risks these practices require. We're often better at storing up treasures—endowments, salaries, pension fund balances—on earth than in heaven.

The average American is 37 years old. The average member (lay or ordained) of my denomination, the Episcopal Church, is 59. When I look at the diocese where I am blessed to serve, I find myself wondering how many churches we will close, and how soon. Before I die, will I vote to end the life of my diocese by merging with another? Or will God act decisively and surprisingly in the life of my diocese and my church, just as God acted decisively and surprisingly in my life more than 20 years ago?

Am I in any way an obstacle to the work of God in the church? What do the hard truths of my time and place mean to me?

These are hard questions, but they are the right questions. They are Ash Wednesday questions. They echo the words of the prophet Joel:

Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Where is our God, the God who worked in our lives for transformation and healing? Where is our God, to bring us new life again?

Reflections on the lectionary

March 5, First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1-11

I REMEMBER the first time I stumbled across the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil. I was in my early twenties, when I was not yet a Christian but I was Christian-curious. I hadn't been raised by or among Christians, but I had recently discovered religion as a Unitarian Universalist. Now that I understood a little bit about faith, I wondered about Christianity.

I wanted to understand how Christians made sense of their strange doctrines. The creator of the universe was born as a human, by a virgin? That human was killed but did not stay dead? These statements baffled me, yet appeared to be acceptable to a majority of the world's population. Were they using some system of internal logic I could comprehend, even if I might not agree?

I hadn't read the Bible much at all. But I had discovered *Weavings*, a magazine published by Upper Room Ministries. I didn't know much about Christianity, but I knew something about good writing and good illustrations. *Weavings* had both. It was created by those mysterious beings, Christians. I realized that reading it might help me in my quest to understand them. So it was that I found myself reading an essay by Wendy Wright on temptation.

She began with the story of Jesus in the desert. Like so much of Christianity, it was confusing. Who was this devil? What was Jesus doing talking to him in the desert? Did people really believe this stuff?

And then I read this sentence: "The tradition teaches that these temptations stand for pride, power, and possession." And all of a sudden my soul—not my mind, but my soul—said "Aha!" as a puzzle piece clicked into place.

I didn't know much about Jesus, the devil, or that desert, but I knew pride. I knew the desire for power; I knew the wish for possessions. I was familiar with all of them, from painful experience.

All of a sudden the story wasn't just about Jesus; it was about me, too. And not just me: it was about all humanity. I knew from the history books and the newspapers that we all struggle with pride, power, and possession. People and nations fight, kill, and die over who is worthy of respect, who gets control, and who owns what. The more I thought about it, the more these three simple words seemed to be at the heart of the human experience.

It began to make complete sense that these were the temptations the devil offered Jesus. They were the same temptations that the devil still offered me.

That "aha!" moment in the midst of a *Weavings* essay was one of many that led me along the road of conversion to the Christian faith. It was not a road my parents had ever meant for me to travel. Ironically, it was my antireligious father who convinced me of the human need for faith. He was 49 years old when I was born and 67 when he died. I spent my childhood witnessing his slow decline, an aging parent facing his mortality. I learned from watching him that death comes to us all; the only question is how we meet it. In the face of death, neither pride nor power nor possession holds much sway. What matters in the face of death is how we, in our mortal lives, relate to the eternal.

I began by recognizing myself in the temptations, but I soon realized that I was meant also to recognize myself in the responses that Jesus makes in return. When tempted to put himself first, he puts God first. He puts spiritual nourishment above bodily nourishment, trust in God above testing God, faithfulness to God above wealth. He places his relationship with the eternal above all—far above the temptations the devil offers. He does all this without a single second's thought, in total unity with God the Father.

It has been 20 years since I found that *Weavings* essay. I've racked up one baptism, one marriage, and two ordinations (UU and then Episcopalian). But I still haven't figured out how to do naturally what Jesus did immediately. I still get swayed by pride, power, and possession—each and every day.

The difference between my life now and 20 years ago is this: I have been baptized into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so I have already died to my mortal being and been raised with Christ. Because of his saving action on the cross, I don't need to be afraid when I succumb to temptation. I can simply begin again. In Lent, and anytime.

When you fall into sin, we are asked at baptism, will you repent and return to the Lord?

I will, goes the reply, with God's help.

I need God's help every single day.

But every single day since I was baptized, I have read myself more and more into the story of the Bible. I have discovered how it actually makes sense that God was born in human flesh, that he was killed but would not stay dead. The facts of incarnation and resurrection have become visible in my life—just as the temptation story once did. It turns out the story does hang together with an internal logic. Twenty years ago when I encountered it, that internal logic was wiser than I was. I could not make sense of scripture then. Now it helps me make sense of me.

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A film by MARTIN DOBLMEIER

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March 12, Second Sunday in Lent
Genesis 12:1–4a; John 3:1–17

I THINK THAT every baptism or confirmation class should include a showing of the movie *Mary Poppins*. Not for the suffragettes or the magic carpetbag. The point is the scene where Mary, Bert, and the children take hands and jump straight into the middle of a sidewalk chalk painting, emerging in an entirely new, much more colorful world.

That's what becoming a disciple does. When you are grafted onto the body of Christ, you leave an old, dreary world behind—and enter a world where the unexpected becomes commonplace. It's not enough simply to say you are a disciple; you actually have to jump.

I was baptized at 25, but I don't think I really jumped until I was past 30. The story that gave me the courage to jump was the passage in Genesis 12 in which Abram is sent out by God.

My life thus far had more or less proceeded according to ordinary, middle-class expectations. I had gone to college. I had gone to seminary, been ordained as a Unitarian Universalist minister, and taken a first call and then a second. But now I was serving a church that wasn't clearly Christian. Historically American Baptist, it had become independent and theologically diverse, and it was undergoing a period of intense change. I didn't understand what held the church together. After a while it became clear that this church wasn't going to hold me.

The problem was, I didn't have anywhere else to go. I was questioning my entire denominational affiliation; I couldn't seek a new call when I was so unsettled in my spiritual life. I loved ministry, but I had to leave ministry. Where was I headed? I didn't know.

The morning that I sat in my prayer chair and realized I needed to hand in my resignation was the day Abram's story became real to me. "Leave behind everything familiar," God says to Abram. "Go to the land that I will show you." Not the land God *has shown* Abram. Abram has to leave before he knows where he is headed. And so did I. First I left the church; then I left my denomination.

My story, like Abram's, worked out. A year after that morning in my prayer chair, I was worshiping among the Episcopalians. Five years later, I was once again in ordained ministry. Now I am part of a tradition that fits me: along with its social mission it has a consistent liturgy and a clear theological foundation.

I didn't know where I was going when I set out on this journey; I got to what the well-known Shaker hymn calls "the place just right" through the grace and mercy of God. My path was taken one step at a time, usually with some hesitation, often in

the dark. I had a lot of good-byes to offer: to friends, to my hard-won final fellowship as a minister, to leadership roles. I offered those good-byes without knowing what I was making room for. I only knew that I had to depart before I could arrive.

"You must be born again," Jesus tells Nicodemus. When you give up your own will to follow the will of God, you are made new. Instead of having control, you give up power. Instead of knowing your destination, you try to be faithful during the journey. Instead of being sure of yourself, you become sure of God.

When Mary Poppins and the others jump through the chalk drawing, they take on the colors of their new world. They are clothed in new, bright clothing; they sing along with the music that is already playing. They are reborn in a world that touches their old world and yet is wondrously different. In that new world there is space not just for work, but for wonder; not just for drudgery, but for delight.

That is the world God means for us to inhabit. God has even come into our world to issue a gracious invitation to this world of joy. God has even died in order that we might die along with him in baptism, so that we might be raised with him to newness of life. This is why in baptism we offer the newly baptized bright new clothing; this is why the newly baptized sing along with the church's ancient song.

Abram showed me how to go forward when I did not know the road.

The story of Abram didn't mean much to me until it became my story, too. But once I adopted it as my own, God used it to guide me faithfully through difficult times. It turns out that jumping becomes easier with practice. After making the leap to leave a church and a denomination, I made the leap to cofound a farm-based ministry. The risk feels great—the model is nonexistent and therefore completely unproven—but wasn't the risk to Abram even greater? And where would we all be today if Abram had said, "Thank you, Lord, but I prefer familiar ground"?

The old stories last because they are true. Maybe we don't need to show *Mary Poppins* at confirmation, after all. Maybe that scene is just one more retelling of the ancient story of new and unending life in Christ. After all, when I needed to take my leap, I didn't think of *Mary Poppins*; I thought of Abram. He showed me how to go forward when I did not know the road.

The author is Nurya Love Parish, who is priest-in-charge of Holy Spirit Episcopal Church in Belmont, Michigan, cofounder of Plainsong Farm, and editor of Grow Christians.



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NEW CENTERS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Seminary at the megachurch

by Jason Byassee and Ross Lockhart

SEMINARY EDUCATION is changing at a high velocity, and no one quite knows where it is headed. Almost everyone agrees that technology will be increasingly important, but no one knows precisely how. Almost everyone agrees that student indebtedness is at catastrophic levels, but no one knows how to wean schools off giving government-guaranteed loans that students will have to pay back after graduation. (The exceptions are the few schools that aim to build an endowment that covers tuition.) Almost everyone knows that most students are not likely to dive into a three-year residential experience far from home. Instead, students are seeking out a seminary education close to home; they tend to be older, with families, and with no intention of quitting their current job. Increasingly they are staying where they are and studying online.

Jason Byassee recently coedited Pastoral Work: Engagements with the Vision of Eugene Peterson. Ross Lockhart's books include Lessons from Laodicea: Missional Leadership in a Culture of Affluence. They both teach at the Vancouver School of Theology.

Arguably, this approach is better for the church. Why should potential congregational leaders uproot their lives, borrow large sums of money, and rip up local connections when they can study online, try out what they learn about ministry in their own congregations, and grow in effectiveness and competence right where they are?

Schools linked to fast-growing megachurches are among those that are adapting more quickly to these new circumstances. Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Asbury Theological Seminary's extension campus in Memphis, and the St. Mellitus College in London illustrate the trend. Their innovative programs arise from partnerships with large congregations that have a track record in evangelism, a pastoral staff adept at media and technology, and church campuses with lots of underutilized space.

Like many innovations in theological education, these changes are in part driven by necessity. Saint Paul School of Theology was located in downtown Kansas City until a financial crisis forced it to close that campus in 2013 and begin holding classes at the Church of the Resurrection in far suburban Leawood, Kansas. With some 20,000 members, Church of the Resurrection is the largest United Methodist congregation in the world.

Faculty and alumni lamented losing an inner-city address in exchange for a home at an exurban church. But the school had natural ties with COR. COR's founding pastor, Adam Hamilton, had been chair of SPST's board, and over the years the church had sent many students to the school. The school already had some experience using other sites for teaching through a partnership with Oklahoma City University. SPST courses were commonly taught live in one setting and virtually on the other campus. Even before the move, SPST had begun reenvisioning its curriculum to bring it closer to the local church, said Hal Knight, a longtime SPST professor.

The close connection to the Church of the Resurrection allows the school to offer practicums with COR pastoral staff on nuts-and-bolts topics like funerals, stewardship, and youth ministry. It also offers the chance to learn from the wider ministry of COR, which has been one of the most effective of all mainline congregations at church growth.

The relationship has also had its tensions, according to Knight. One is that COR is part of the centrist-to-evangelical wing of the United Methodist Church, while SPST has been a more liberal and social justice-oriented institution. An academic institution and a congregation also operate on different rhythms. For example, when COR had a midweek funeral, it would sometimes bump the seminary's daily worship service out of the chapel. But church-school communication has improved over time. If the alliance is leveraged correctly, the school could position itself as a place that produces ministers who understand how to lead congregations based on the experience of COR.

Knight says SPST's regret at moving out of the city was colored with some false nostalgia: "We weren't doing a lot of social justice ministry," he said. Drafting off the energy and resources of a giant and growing congregation has allowed the

school to survive when otherwise it might have closed. Knight compared SPST's alignment with the Church of the Resurrection to the way some other seminaries have embedded themselves in universities or university-related divinity schools.

Another experiment in theological education is the Memphis campus of Asbury Theological Seminary. Asbury is a school in the Wesleyan tradition, and though it has no official relationship to the United Methodist Church, it trains as many UMC ministers as the 13 official UMC seminaries combined. In 2013 the school was given use of an entire building at Christ United Methodist Church, a growing congregation of some 5,000 in Memphis.

More and more, students seek to learn close to home or study online.

The church's pastor, Shane Stanford, is known in the UMC for cohosting the most recent iteration of the denomination's Disciple Bible study. His predecessor at Christ Church was Maxie Dunham, who later became president of Asbury. The school hired Jason Vickers from the faculty of United Theological Seminary, where he'd been a prolific author and speaker and helped take that school from the brink of extinction to viability largely by investing early in online education. As Asbury-Memphis's lone faculty member, Vickers is leading what he calls a "seminary plant," an analogy to a church plant.

This year Asbury-Memphis has close to 80 students. The school aims to serve a metropolitan region where there have been few options for theological education. Vickers calls the school "intensely regional." Most students commute from their homes in Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, or Missouri. They don't have to move to Wilmore, Kentucky—the site of Asbury's main campus—but can keep their jobs, pay for school, and develop as ministers where they are.

Asbury-Memphis makes little effort to offer on-campus formation, drawing instead on Christ Church's ministry. Vickers says the church is "neck deep in every kind of ministry imaginable in the downtown core of Memphis, so there's a real urban renewal piece here."

Students may complement their Memphis course work with online work at Asbury, but the school is not moving toward offering a fully remote degree. "The vision isn't 65 hours online and 12 to 20 in Memphis, but probably the other way around," Vickers said.

One of the youngest and fastest-growing theological schools in the West is St. Mellitus College in London, established by the bishops of London and Chelmsford in 2007. It is named after the first bishop of London, who lived in the early seventh century. Mellitus is known for his missionary engagement with the pre-Christian Britons, so he's an apt

figure to preside over an institution seeking to reach post-Christian Britons.

The college, which has about 400 students, was not created ex nihilo. It is the merger of two diocesan-based initiatives for equipping missional leaders. St. Paul's Theological Centre at Holy Trinity Brompton Church (home of the Alpha Program) joined with the North Thames Ministerial Training Center and in 2012 moved into a facility built for them at St. Jude's Church in Earl's Court in the west of London. The new digs include wired classrooms, a library, offices, and meeting spaces. St. Mellitus is developing an array of programs in church planting, youth ministry, and short-course introductions to Christianity.

With its focus on "generous orthodoxy," worship, missional leadership, and engagement with a post-Christian Britain, St. Mellitus has quickly become a center for people working for the revitalization of the church in the rocky soil of the United Kingdom. It has assembled an impressive faculty, including former archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. Williams said, "In a relatively short time, St. Mellitus has established itself as a uniquely innovative training institution for ministry in the Church of England, offering a model of intellectual and spiritual formation that is serious, challenging, and creative."

St. Mellitus names academic excellence as a core priority—no surprise at an Anglican school. But from the begin-

ning St. Mellitus has fused academic learning and praxis, moving well beyond the standard field-education model. It sees students' lack of mobility as a strength, not a problem. Students spend just a little time on campus, and the school puts a great focus on students' nurturing Christian witness in their own community. Students at St. Mellitus hear things from faculty and bishops like "We want priests who can cut mustard in the Pig & Whistle"—that is, pastors who know

Schools linked to large churches have been able to adapt to changing circumstances.

how to engage in witness and theological reflection at the local pub.

Sam Wells, vicar at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, said that St. Mellitus has "developed real momentum by absorbing not only ordination candidates but also next-stage new believers and laypeople dipping a toe in theological water." While St. Mellitus is facing the growing pains expected at a young institution, Wells said the school has already done three remarkable things: invigorated the diocese of London, breathed energy into nonresidential training, and shown the wider church

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that Holy Trinity Brompton—which has had a unique place in the Anglican world—is serious about its connection to the whole church.

It's the graduates who will ultimately test St. Mellitus's claim to produce Christian leaders with "diligence for study, fervor for mission, and perseverance for ministry." As Darrell Guder at Princeton Theological Seminary once said, "the test of theological education is not what kind of graduates a college produces at convocation, but rather what kind of Christian communities are they equipping and nurturing years after they leave the seminary."

One of those recent graduates of St. Mellitus is already making a big impact in Canada. Graham Singh's reentry into the Christian faith came from a coworker's unexpected question,

"Would you like to come to church with me this weekend?" Singh, a graduate of the London School of Economics who was working happily in London, gave his colleague a friendly but firm rebuff. Having been raised in a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Singh had drifted in the church's great alumni association, with only occasional visits to church on holidays back home in Ontario. His coworker respected the polite rejection but kept the door open.

One day Singh accepted the invitation and attended the friend's local church—which was Holy Trinity Brompton. There the Holy Spirit "re-called" Singh to a life of discipleship that eventually caused him to leave the business world for theological studies at St. Mellitus and ordination in the Church of England.

STARTUP SEMINARIES

Some important experiments in theological education are happening on a small scale. The Immerse program at Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia, and the Yellowstone Theological Initiative in Montana are examples of what might be called "boutique" institutions, which are small enough to be able to change and try new things quickly.

Northwest Baptist is part of a consortium of conservative seminaries at Trinity Western University. It is wed to a small denomination called the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches, which has some 100 congregations in British Columbia and the Yukon Territory, a partner-school called Fellowship Pacific.

Northwest has received a great deal of media attention because of its Immerse program. This competency-based model of theological education, launched in 2012, hands students a degree not when they have passed a certain number of courses but when they have demonstrated competency in a few dozen specific areas. Competency is judged by mentors assigned from the seminary faculty, the denomination, and the congregation in which the student is working. The model is affordable because the student is employed and doing ministry while being

evaluated. The degree is accredited with the Association of Theological Schools as a benevolent exception—ATS wants to support the increasing variety of models of theological education. The program works partly because Fellowship Pacific is a small group with relatively tight understanding of what makes for a good minister. Even so, denominational and school officials have had to hash out long-held stereotypes: that the school is a clueless ivory tower, and that the local church is a brainless place where charisma trumps everything else.

President Kent Anderson describes Immerse as a reverse-engineered education. Normally we think of the client of theological education as being the student. That's a mistake, according to Anderson. The client is actually the local church that will be served by this student throughout his or her career. When the seminary asks the local church what it wants, it will be amazed at what the church comes up with.

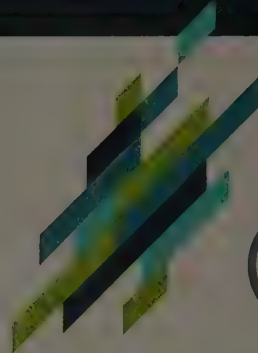
Anderson recalls that a denominational official said to the seminary faculty, "We need some more exegesis in here, some stronger hermeneutics in this program." The professors' jaws dropped—a church was opting for an academic field over how-to's or cheap tricks for growth. "It was a good moment," Anderson said.

Another startup in the northwest is the Yellowstone Theological Institute. The president, Jay Smith, was a pastor in Bozeman, Montana, who decided that much of the training he'd received in Southern Baptist institutions in the United States was ill-suited to the west, which was a post-Christendom region if not a territory hostile to the faith. "Youth groups would come up here from places like Texas and try to evangelize door-to-door, and they'd get spit at," Smith said.

Yellowstone, which started in 2012, is funded by a former parishioner of Smith's who made money in wireless technology. Plans for a beautiful campus in Bozeman are on the drawing board. Meanwhile, faculty teach some 40 students in churches in Boise, Idaho, and Bellingham, Washington, as well as in Bozeman, offering courses for both laypeople and potential ministers. The school admitted its first M.Div. student last fall—impressive for an institution without a campus. Like Immerse, the curriculum is competency-based.

Churches have long outsourced theological education to research universities or schools inspired by the university model of education. If the church is going to take back theological education, and if it wants to develop ministers who can help the church grow in unpromising soil, it will need to draw on the wisdom of pastors who have done this work. These schools are gambling that competency-based education is the way to do that.

—JB and RL



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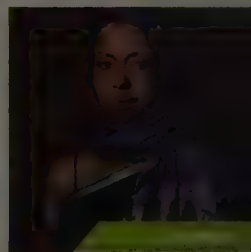
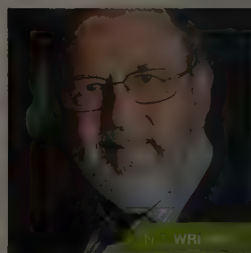
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After serving on staff at HTB, Singh felt the call to return home to Canada. He moved with his family to Guelph, Ontario, a midsized city outside of Toronto where he grew up and where his father and grandfather had been doctors. Singh teamed up with Lakeside Church to reopen a historic 175-year-old United Church of Canada congregation—renamed Lakeside Downtown—that had closed after years of decline. Singh spent the next three years drawing on his training at St. Mellitus and building leadership and relationships in the neighborhood.

When asked why a church planter would want an old church building Singh said, “Old churches are centers for our community. There are very few parts of our human existence where we really understand the depth of our human history. Old churches help us to stay connected with a deeper sense of community and history.”

Singh then accepted the invitation of Anglican bishop Mary Irwin-Gibson to move to Montreal and to serve the almost-closed St. James Church in the core of the city. Montreal presents unique challenges to church planters. The historic dominance of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec and the subsequent rejection of the church by people during the “quiet revolution” of the 1960s have left behind a post-Christian culture with a lingering hostility to Christian witness. Singh’s engagement with the local community is bolstered by his bilingualism (a critical asset in Quebec) as well as his willingness to be a “fool for Christ” even if that means wearing a pink bunny suit and walking the streets of the city inviting people to church.

Singh worries that too many seminaries are responding to the shifting sands of gospel and culture by trying to bolt one more skill set onto an already cumbersome master’s program. Singh notes that it was the dynamic partnership between the ministry of Holy Trinity Brompton Church and the bishop of London—apart from any university—that gave birth to St. Mellitus.

Central to each of these experiments in theological education is the connection to a large—even enormous—congregation that has the resources and confidence to provide ministerial training. These seminaries are also located in metropolitan regions from which they can pull students and to which they can send

graduates. But these schools haven’t grown by focusing only on church-growth strategies, as some critics might assume. They have been led by ministers who are deeply invested in theological education and who are effective at encouraging people who feel called to ministry. These leaders want to educate seminarians right where they are.

These experiments show that an educated clergy is still central to mainline church ministry. But what is meant by education—and how people get it—is changing. CC

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**BEXLEY SEABURY'S MODEL
FOR THE M.DIV.**

Forming priests among the people

by Celeste Kennel-Shank

THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

debate how much field education is the right amount and how to integrate practical experience into ministerial training. But what if field education were inseparable from M.Div. courses? And what if seminarians' primary classmates were the people in the congregations they serve during their three years of seminary?

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Bexley Seabury Seminary, an Episcopal school based in Chicago, has such a model in mind as it relaunches its M.Div. degree program. "At every step," the school states, "students will be challenged to connect the content of their academic work with insights and reflections drawn from their internship experience."

KyungJa Oh, director of field education and formation, sees the advantages of keeping students rooted in the context of ministry.

"It doesn't make sense to cloister students and give them a lot of theory and methodology and send them out," she said. "By learning in their context, they have real-life examples, not some example the instructor cooks up."

Part of the plan is sending faculty members to the students' locations to teach alongside the supervising pastors, congregational governing bodies, and other parishioners who are interested. Participants from several such congregations gather for plenary sessions and apply the lessons to their own parishes and programs. Activities and assignments address real issues in those congregations.

Oh sees this approach as a way to prepare ministers for the ways the church—and the culture around it—is changing. "We want to train ordained leaders who are agile . . . who are adaptable," she said.

Adapting to changing circumstances is something the schools that have come together as Bexley Seabury already know something about.

In 2008, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, an Episcopal school in Evanston, Illinois, was faced with a financial crisis that caused it to suspend its M.Div. program. The school maintained its D.Min. and other programs and relocated to space in the Chicago headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Seabury also began conversations with Bexley Hall about a shared future. At the time, Bexley Hall was in a partnership with Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

The two Episcopal schools "avoided the word *merging* and used the word *federating*," said Roger Ferlo, who became president of the seminaries when they officially federated



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in 2012 and launched a joint M.Div. program based in Columbus.

The schools created a parent organization that allows the separate corporations of Bexley Hall and Seabury-Western to continue to exist. The schools have a combined endowment of about \$24 million. Part of that money came from the sale of Seabury's property in Evanston (Bexley Hall has not owned a building since 1968). Another \$2 million came to Bexley Seabury after it renewed its relationship with the Episcopal Church's diocese in Minnesota and received monies held in a diocesan trust for theological education.

Currently, there are ten Episcopal seminaries, including Bexley Seabury. In response to its own financial crisis, the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, will stop granting degrees in July and is currently exploring options for how to use its resources, such as funding scholarships or becoming a center for continuing education and lay training. Bexley Seabury and EDS are working toward an agreement by which EDS's distance-learning students could transfer to Bexley Seabury.

The Episcopal Church has seen a trend toward programs for training people for the priesthood that are not seminary-based. An example is the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry, in which the Episcopal Church's dioceses of Kansas, Nebraska, West Missouri, and Western Kansas collaborate to educate people to be priests, deacons, and lay ministers. A drawback to such programs is that they are not accredited.

Ferlo is concerned that congregations will prefer to hire people with a seminary degree, leaving the graduates of diocesan programs at a disadvantage. "My fear is that we will have a two-tiered priesthood," he said.

Bexley Seabury's programs—including its new model for the M.Div. degree—are fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. ATS received a grant from the Lilly Endowment to support innovations among theological schools, and that helps provide funds for faculty development.

"We're serving students for whom a traditional kind of seminary won't work."

Even with accreditation and support from ATS, Ferlo and his colleagues know they are taking a chance. "These institutions are very fragile," he said.

Yet the fragility is also a kind of strength, Ferlo said, since "we have no choice but to take risks."

Bexley Seabury does not see itself as going after the same students who are interested in residential Episcopal seminaries. "We're not in competition with Virginia Theological

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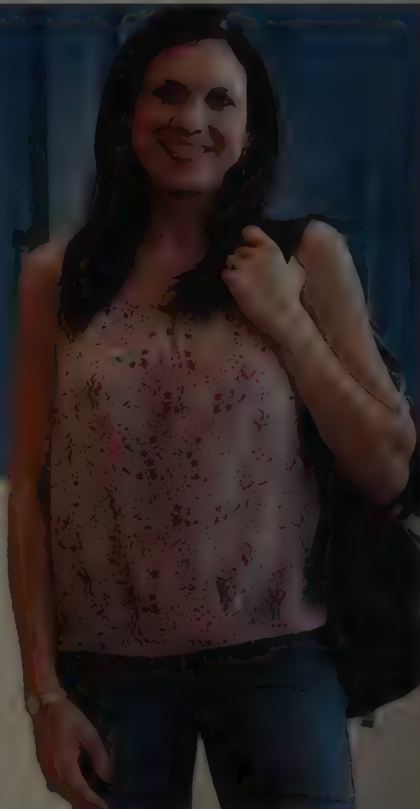




Photo by Celeste Kennel-Shank

NEW MODEL FOR AN M.DIV.: Roger Ferlo (left), president of Bexley Seabury Seminary Federation, and KyungJa Oh (right), director of field education and formation, converse in their offices at Chicago Theological Seminary, where they moved last summer. Bexley Seabury has launched a new way of educating seminarians based in a particular parish for all three years of their M.Div. studies.

Seminary or Sewanee or Yale. We're serving students for whom those places don't work," said Ferlo.

Bexley Seabury seeks students who want to enroll full-time in a program that blends online learning and contextual learning. Half of the courses Bexley Seabury students take are through Chicago Theological Seminary, which in 2013 began offering a completely online M.Div. degree.

Bexley Seabury rents office space from CTS, which built a new building in 2012 in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago, near several other theological schools. The design for CTS's new building included space for renters, said Alice Hunt, CTS president. In addition to offering Bexley Seabury students courses and the opportunity to attend daily chapel, CTS provides some administrative support.

Oh has an intuition that "teaching the M.Div. this way will address the problem of clericalism, because it's not just 'Father knows best.' Everyone has experience." The supervising priests will offer professional guidance to students, but people in the parish are likely to be teachers as well—which may lessen some of the mystique surrounding clergy. "Theological education is not just for priests anymore," Oh said.

Supervising clergy sign up to work with a seminarian for the three years of the M.Div., beginning in the second half of the first year. The idea is that the priests at internship sites initially provide training in the tasks of ministry and move to mentoring students in those tasks in the second year. In the final year, the student functions like a curate, or assistant pastor,

working on the church staff in a paid internship. (Unlike traditional curates in the Episcopal world, the students will not yet be ordained.) Bexley Seabury is still working on the funding possibilities for the internships.

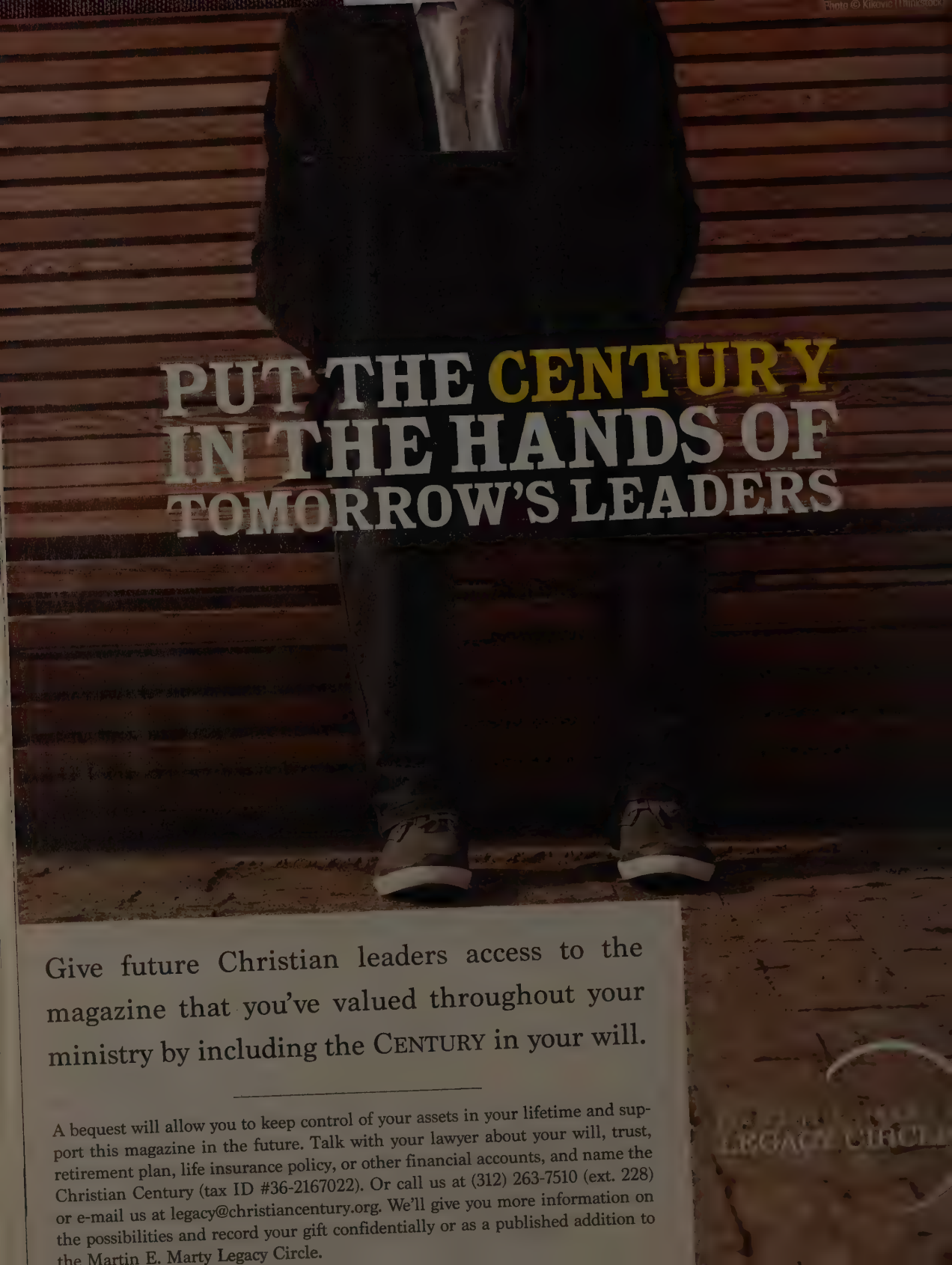
Oh plans to stay in touch with the students by phone, videoconferencing, and e-mail. Supervising clergy meet with peers for their own continuing education. Oh expects that feedback from clergy, parishioners, and students will change the program as it develops. "We want to be very careful that we are not removing a rigid program and inserting another rigid program."

Bexley Seabury has already gone through a financial crisis.

More learning will come through regional gatherings of seminarians and supervising clergy. Bexley Seabury also offers intensive one-week and weekend classes.

John Addison Dally, professor of theology and culture at Bexley Seabury, is one of the faculty teaching a five-day intensive class, and he is looking at opportunities to build community outside of the class sessions. He is anticipating traveling to the students' parishes and teaching in a way that encourages seminarians to be listeners first, rather than leaders who have all the answers.

"We want to go into the site and have everybody learn together, so they have a common reference," he said. Dally has

A person wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and tie is standing on a set of wooden stairs. They are wearing dark sneakers with white soles. The background is the wooden wall and steps of the stairs.

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also been honing his skills in online teaching through live-streaming lectures.

At a time when so many seminaries are facing financial crises, said Dally, a strength of Bexley Seabury is that it has already gone through one.

"We weathered it," he said. "You have to go through. It's possible to come out on the other side, but you can't do [theological education] the way you've been doing it." He thinks the school's new model will help form pastors who can in turn develop innovative, sustainable models for congregations: "We're creating leaders to go into a situation where there might be a lack of resources, but they find the resources that are there."

As the January term began, Bexley Seabury had a total of 12 M.Div. students. Three of them are continuing students, including Andrew Christiansen, who began his studies in Columbus and is now in his third year and doing field education in Wisconsin.

"I have hopes for Bexley Seabury in its current incarnation," Christiansen said, noting that the incoming class at orientation, though small, was dramatically larger than the class he was part of in Ohio. He appreciates the flexibility he's had in forming his class schedule at Bexley Seabury. During the fall semester, he took some classes online at Bexley Seabury and CTS and took other classes in person at a nearby Methodist seminary and at Nashotah House, the Episcopal seminary near Milwaukee. He thinks this ecumenical approach—and even the peripatetic aspects—will serve him well as he prepares to become a chaplain to military families.

Building deep friendships with such a pattern of education is more difficult, but not impossible, Christiansen noted. "It just takes an extra, more intentional effort." He will miss the worship experiences and regular common meals shared with Lutheran students at Trinity Seminary in Columbus. It will be a challenge for Bexley Seabury to offer opportunities for group formation, but he has heard incoming students talk about creating community-building activities in regions where students are clustered, as well as making the most of their times in Chicago.

Ferlo, who will retire in the fall, says "there are no guarantees" of the school's success. The candidate profile that is posted online identifies the need for the next president to raise revenue, reduce the amount drawn from the endowment, and to lessen operating deficits. But the profile also names Bexley Seabury's move to the CTS campus and the creation of an innovative, low-residency M.Div. program as a foundation to build on. Ferlo said, "We think that this is a harbinger of the future for stand-alone seminaries."

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The dance of faith

by Aristotle Papanikolaou

WHEN I WAS HIRED at Fordham University in 2000, I was told that I was to teach the core freshman theology course, Faith and Critical Reason. I guessed that many students in the class would resent being forced to take a theology course as a core requirement, for two reasons: (1) many students would be burned out on the theology courses they might have taken in a private Catholic high school; and (2) some students would question how theology could be taught in an academic setting when it is a matter of private, subjective “opinion.” The study of theology is virtually absent in schools at all levels in the United States, and many students find it an affront that Fordham would dare defy that consensus on the moratorium on the study of theology. These students, I thought, would be on the defensive, having already decided that taking this course was simply the price they had to pay for attending Fordham.

Aristotle Papanikolaou teaches theology and codirects the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University. This article is excerpted from Eastern Orthodox Christianity and American Higher Education: Theological, Historical, and Contemporary Reflections, edited by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides and Elizabeth H. Prodromou. Reprinted by permission of the University of Notre Dame Press.

Photo © Key05 / Thinkstock

I structured my course to address this resistance by making students aware of how they arrived at their own ideas about theology. To accomplish this self-critical awareness, I set up the first part of the course as a sociological, historical, and philosophical exploration of secularization in the United States. We look at the debate about secularization, return to the past to make schematic sense of how we got here, and discuss fundamentalism as the face of modern religion. In historically tracing the process of secularization, students study Descartes, Newton, and the masters of suspicion—Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud—who, in my opinion, did theology a favor with their unrelenting and vociferous attacks on religion.

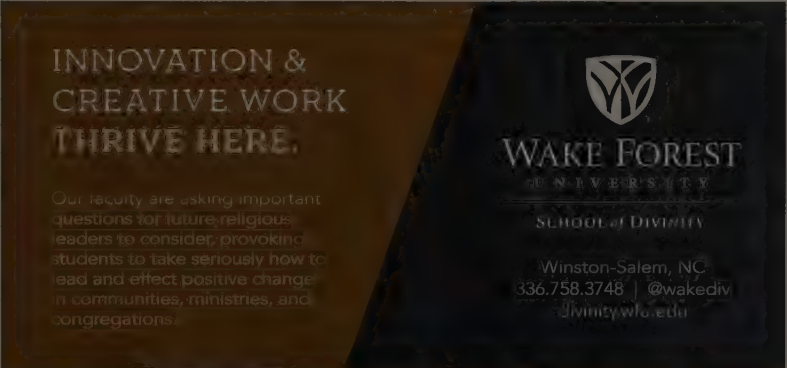
My goal in this part of the course is to make students aware that their ideas about theology, their interpretation of the religious experience in terms of being religious versus being spiritual, and their resistance to and caricatures of what it means to be religious did not emerge in a vacuum. Where they stand in relation to theology has much to do with a process that began almost 400 years ago with the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. They are products of this history as much as they are actors in it. I end with a discussion of fundamentalism to demonstrate that what students see as the dominant face of religion is, ironically, a modern phenomenon. In making students more critically aware of the context within which they construct their own ideas about theology and religion, I help them to be more open to thinking otherwise. My goal is to open them up to the possibility of theology as a form of self-critical reflection on questions posed to the human experience that are simply unavoidable.

It is only after they develop this self-critical awareness of the current situation that I lead the students to more existential questions about faith: faith and the existence of evil, the nature of faith, faith and reason, and faith and practices. Christian theology is not explicitly addressed in this latter part of the course, although it clearly frames the discussion. The exploration of these themes is self-consciously theological. But the goal is less to convey specific content than to open students to new ways of thinking about these issues—ways different from the usual caricatures.

Many students think that theology attempts to rationalize the existence of

God in light of evil. But is that the only way to think about the question of God and evil? Some students think that faith has nothing to do with reason. But is that really the case? Most students think that one faith cannot be argued to be more reasonable than another faith—even if that faith is in something absurd, like the flying spaghetti monster. But does that make sense? Students also think the point of religious practices is to prove oneself to God. But is that all there is to it?

Students who declare that they are spiritual as opposed to religious tend to have a monolithic view of religion, which religions themselves have fostered. They think to be a part of reli-

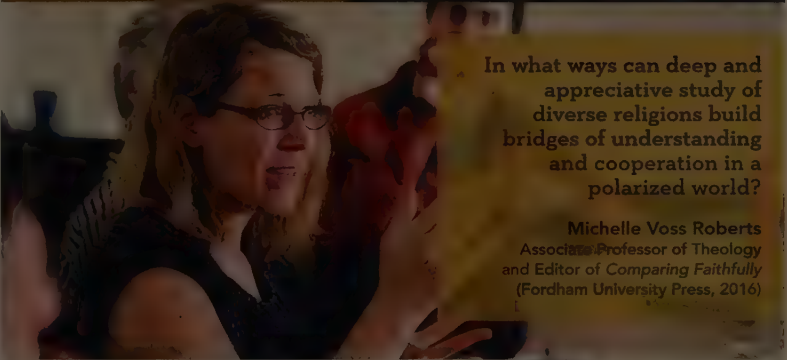


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Michelle Voss Roberts
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gion is to blindly accept an authoritarian structure that dictates what should be believed, is run by dictatorial leaders, and tries to scare people into compliance by reminding them of the possibility of hell. Students think the gist of religion is to do and believe what one is told so as to get a reward after death. They also think religion is hypocritical, as it seems not to practice what it preaches. Notwithstanding the measure of truth embedded within these claims, my goal is to show the students that it could be otherwise.

Students think of religion as a coercive structure. I try to show that it's a way of life.

This “otherwise” is an understanding of the human being as called to a relationship of communion with God. I emphasize an understanding of the God-world relation in terms of *theosis*, which I prefer to translate as divine-human communion. Practices like prayer and fasting were not developed to prove something to God or to score points with God. They are time-tested practices that rewire the body to make it available to the always-on-offer presence of God. It is at this point of the course that my own Orthodox Christian faith is most apparent.

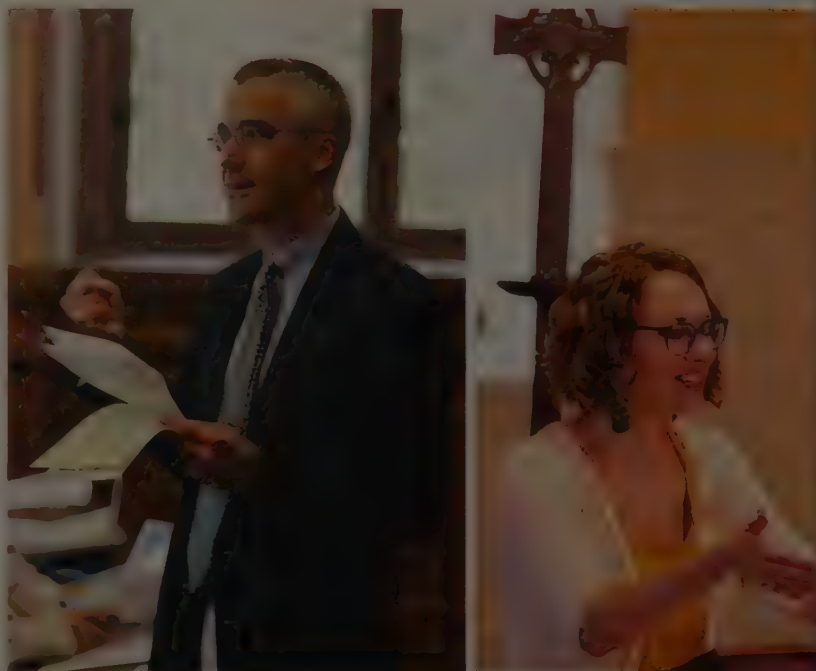
I want to show my students that their understanding of bad

religion is based on bad theology—a nominalist, dualistic conception of a God who stands over and against the world, creating the world, dictating rules, and moving souls around after death. I hope to persuade them that good theology attempts to make sense of how God can be in relation to the not-God, the world, and still be God, or how the world can be in communion with God without being consumed by divinity. For this reason, I end the course with readings either written by Orthodox thinkers (such as St. Gregory of Nyssa or Anthony Bloom) or treating an Orthodox theme like the Jesus Prayer (as in J. D. Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey*).

I try to lead students away from overbearing überstructures designed to force people to think a certain way or think they are never doing enough. Instead, I lead them toward an understanding of being religious that has to do with formation of the person to be in a certain way—a being that is in communion with the divine. Being religious is less about agreeing to certain propositions or following certain rules, and more about transforming one’s mode of being in the world. Being religious is very much like being an artist.

Because Fordham has a special BFA program with the Alvin Ailey School, I use dance as an analogy. I ask the students whether someone who has studied dance but has never danced “knows” dance as well as someone who has trained as a dancer. They immediately and instinctively answer

EDUCATING FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN LEADERS



that the trained dancer knows more about dance. I then try to lead them to articulate what this knowing entails, if it's not simply reading books about dance and attending performances. A dancer must submit to a regimen of training that usually begins with basic practices that must be mastered to the point where they are performed without thinking. This training is done under the tutelage of a teacher, who has been through the training. The student of dance then progresses to more advanced practices, still under the guidance of a teacher, struggling to integrate techniques of dance into their very being as a dancer.

All this training is usually done within an institutional setting, where there are clear hierarchies, boards of directors, politics, a community of dancers that don't all like one another, dancers who are more concerned with their ego than simply dance for the sake of dance. And yet, in the midst of all this ugliness, there is a tradition of formation in dance that is passed on from generation to generation. It is time-tested, and through it one may emerge as a dancer, but it could not have been formed without institutionalization. It's only by submitting to this tradition that one can lead oneself to a kind of performance where a dancer is not aware of the audience, is not dancing to the audience, but is dancing simply for the sake of dance. This is the kind of performance where the dancer doesn't control the choreography; rather, the choreography and all that it attempts to express has seized the dancer. Those capable of this kind of performance are usually the saints of the tradition of dance. They don't attempt to reify the past, but they add to the tradition while always remaining within it. This kind of performance could never be possible without submitting to the training, and it's only through the practices of the tradition that one can hope to be this kind of dancer.

Being religious, then, is about being in a way that embodies the divine presence, and working toward being available to the divine presence in and through religious practices and tradition. Being religious is not a set of rules one must follow or a bunch of propositions to which one must assent; it is first and foremost an art form, an expression of beauty that is also truth and goodness. The rules and propositions of the tradition—and every tradition has its rules and propositions—aim at the production of the person as a work of art.

To illustrate this, I turn explicitly to the Christian commandment "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all

your soul, and with all your mind . . . and . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:36–39). I pose a hypothetical to the students: If I had a neighbor whom I hated and toward whom I felt anger, but I gave that neighbor \$5,000 so that he or she could avoid being "whacked" for not paying gambling debts, have I fulfilled the commandment? The students are smart enough to know that just giving money out of kindness or out of sympathy does not fulfill the commandment. I then tell them that, hypothetically, as a Christian, I have a problem—I know in my heart that I have hate and anger for my neighbor. As Maximus the Confessor says, "The one who sees a trace of hatred in his own

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heart through any fault at all toward any man whoever he may be makes himself completely foreign to the love for God, because love for God in any way admits of no hatred for man." How, then, do I change that? Once we get past comments like, "Well you can love someone without liking them," students start to get the idea that love is something that one works toward, something that is realized in a way that has depth in and through certain practices. My hate for my neighbor may be overcome if I force myself to have conversations with him. Conversation is a practice. Students understand that two people who celebrate 50 years of commitment have a love that is different than when they first met. Such a celebration does not necessarily mean that the relationship was free of moments of temptation and possible betrayal. But students understand that for two people to celebrate such a love that has achieved a depth not present at the start of the relationship, practices had to be performed. These practices both sustain the relationship and make it possible for love to reach such depths.

Maximus is constantly in the back of my mind as I try to explain to the students that practices help to form virtues such as patience, kindness, honesty, empathy, forgiveness—to name only a few—that are needed to make growth in love possible and to avoid vices such as dishonesty, fear, anger, hatred, and self-loathing, which destroy relationships. The Christian commandment to love is a calling to a certain kind of relationship with God, a realization of love. Since God is love, it's a relation-

ship of communion with God, of experience of God, of *theosis*. This relationship, however, requires work. Not to merit the love—as if love could be merited—but to make oneself available for the fullness of love that God offers, which is nothing less than God's very life.

Students are not quite sure what to say when I ask them how a practice like fasting contributes to the learning of love. I explain that fasting is linked to something we consume every day, food; that every time we fast, it's an occasion to bring God to our awareness; and that this awareness helps sustain a relation with God that makes love possible. This makes sense to the students. If two people had a relationship of distance and never wrote to one another, then forgetfulness would be likely, and love could not grow. Since God is invisible, forgetfulness of God is one of the greatest human temptations. Fasting helps to mitigate that forgetfulness and, in so doing, makes love for God possible. In addition to memory, fasting as a discipline helps form the virtues mentioned above, which, again, are the condition for the possibility of realizing a depth of love.

There are plenty of Christians who follow all the rules and assent to all the required propositions but cannot seem to get past anger and hatred of those who disagree with their propositions and rules. And there are Christians who use faithfulness to rules and propositions as a platform for attacking others. But in the end, to *be* Christian is not simply to follow rules and assent to propositions; to *be* Christian is to love in the form of the greatest commandment. Like being a dancer, it is to perform love in such a way that love (God) has seized our being.

The question of this generation of college students is not "why God?" but "why religion?" My hope, perhaps overly optimistic, is to introduce a different way of understanding being religious, one that entails an experience of the living God. The possibility of such an experience requires tradition, institutionalization, and practices. But this experience emerges in a way that allows one to manifest the beauty of the tradition even amid its ugliness and to situate oneself in relation to this ugliness without anger, hatred, or self-righteousness.

My students are searching for purity. I teach them that they will not find it and that they need to learn to live with ambiguity—even in a liberal democracy, in which lie their greatest hopes. What I want them to see is that humans are created for communion with the living God. There is a way of being religious that is the experience of God, and it is this experience that gives them the greatest hope to negotiate the ambiguity in the world.

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Chaplain Abdullah Antepli

When Muslims talk to Jews

IMAM ABDULLAH ANTEPLI grew up in southeastern Turkey and moved to the United States in 2003 to study at Hartford Seminary. He became the Muslim chaplain at Wesleyan University and in 2008 was named Muslim chaplain at Duke University, where he is now director of the university's Center for Muslim Life and teaches at Duke Divinity School. He is founder and board member of the Association of College Muslim Chaplains. Since 2013 Antepli has been codirector of the Muslim Leadership Initiative at the Shalom Hartman Institute, a program that brings North American Muslim leaders to Jerusalem to study with Jewish scholars, focusing on the history of Israel and Judaism and issues facing the people of Israel and Palestine.

What launched you on your path toward seeking interfaith understanding?

The Turkey I grew up in had attempted to create a mono-religious and mono-ideological society, but many in my generation, which grew up in the 1980s, rebelled against the forced homogeneity. Personally I always found similarities boring and cross-religious, cross-cultural, cross-racial conversations incredibly enlightening. Those who were different from me were like a mirror in which I could see myself. There is something innate in me that is attracted to things that are different from myself.

Did you have opportunities while growing up to meet people who were culturally or religiously different?

My first introduction was through history books. In middle school I found out that before 1913 one-third of the town that I grew up in was Armenian and that it once had 17 Armenian churches. None survived the genocide. And there was some nostalgia for the time of the Ottoman Empire when Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived together in harmony. I went out of my way to connect with the small numbers of Jews and Christians that remained in Turkey. During high school I visited Greece for the first time. I had an unstoppable desire to get out of Turkey and explore the world.

My real introduction to living, practicing Western Christians and Jews came when I was a humanitarian worker for eight years in Southeast Asia. I worked in Malaysia and Myanmar setting up orphanages and schools for youths who were at high risk of being sold as sex slaves. Most of my colleagues were Christian missionaries.

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That was my real introduction to Christians who take their love of God and manifest it in service to humanity. Sometimes I had difficulty understanding their motivation, and sometimes I felt their service was conditional on converting people to their own faith. But I always loved their service to humanity.

There seems to be a strong strain of anti-Judaism and anti-Zionism in many streams of Islam. Where does that come from?

Islam has its own theological, scriptural, and doctrinal anti-Semitism, but it is very different from Christian anti-Semitism. Because of Judaism's unique relationship to Christianity, the way the church evolved, and the heated debates about who Jesus is, anti-Semitism very quickly moved into the heart of

“Over time, political anti-Semitism has gained religious legitimacy in Islam.”

Christianity. The very symbol of Christianity, the cross, has pumped anti-Semitism into Christianity in subtle and unsubtle ways. The central story of Christianity can be distorted in an anti-Semitic direction.

Islam has not had anti-Semitism at its heart in that way. But unfortunately a kind of anti-Semitism has moved into Islam, and I was a victim of it. I grew up staunchly anti-Semitic.

The first book I read about Jews was a children's version of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The second book was Henry Ford's *The International Jew*. The third was *Mein Kampf*. These were my introductions to Judaism.

My journey is representative of the modern Islamic turn toward anti-Semitism, because what made me an anti-Semite was not my religion but the socioeconomic and geopolitical context. Muslim anti-Semitism is mostly a post-1948 phenome-

non: it arose because of how the Muslim world experienced and perceived the creation of the state of Israel. Israel was seen as the result of a colonial land grab by Western Judeo-Christian civilization. Over time, this political anti-Semitism gained religious legitimacy and endorsement.

A hundred years ago, if you had shown any Muslim the charter of Hamas—which is horrifically anti-Semitic—they would have laughed at it. They would never have considered anti-Semitism a major part of Muslim theology. Muslims have rewritten their understanding of scripture and theology in anti-Semitic fashion.

How do you try to combat that?

It will require a different strategy from the one Christians used to combat Christian anti-Semitism. It is remarkable and admirable the extent to which Christian anti-Semitism has been defeated in the West. The Catholic and the Protestant churches revised their religious imagination and eliminated anti-Semitic elements from their books, teachings, and lexicon. Most of this effort was a response to the Holocaust. How much would have happened without that? I hope Muslims will be able to defeat anti-Semitism in Islam without waiting to see the worst of what it can do.

We must fight Islamic anti-Semitism on religious grounds, but socioeconomic and political anti-Semitism needs to be addressed on its own grounds. Palestinian suffering matters. Achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would make a huge contribution—though that solution is very unlikely. In the absence of that, the Muslim and Jewish communities have to work hard to make sure that the conflict in the Middle East doesn't continue to push Muslims toward hatred for Jews and Judaism.

You've mentioned how central the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is. How can Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the West be constructive in addressing this seemingly intractable conflict?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is like a bitter divorce case. When a couple after 20 years of marriage goes through a bitter divorce, they bring up all the negative memories they have about each other and they rewrite the history of the relationship. All they can remember is the horrible stuff that they said and did to each other. In order to get out of this vicious cycle, we have to try to create some empathy toward the other.

That's what I'm trying to do with the Muslim Leadership Initiative. Can we Muslims learn to see the world through the eyes of Jews? Can we show that we are capable of walking in their shoes and at least create a respectful language by which we can speak and hear each other? Can we see each other as something other than an existential threat?

There are two different extremes in the conversation over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is one set of conversations that deliberately ignores the conflict—the conflict is the elephant in the room. Often these groups talk

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about how Islam is a religion of peace, Judaism is a religion of love and grace, and Christianity is a religion of love. At best these conversations are a waste of time and at worst they only empower violent elements by showing that conversation is unproductive. The other extreme is when people with deeply entrenched political views come together to try to show that the other side is wrong.

There must be a way we can explore our similarities, hear about the other's fears, speak about our political differences, and go beyond these disagreements to see what is the greater good.

You've been criticized specifically for your work with the Muslim Leadership Initiative by people on the Palestinian side who see studying with Zionist Jews in Israel as an act of so-called normalizing relations with Israel. How do you respond?

Many of these criticisms are ill-informed. They are knee-jerk reactions to social media by people who don't know what MLI is and who is involved. All they hear is that Muslims are schmoozing with Zionist Jews. I try to explain what the program is and who is involved and the background and track record of the American Muslims involved.

If people are condemning me just for engaging with Zionist Jews—if they are saying no to a handshake with Jews, no to a conversation with Jews—then there's really not much I can say in response. But if someone is criticizing me for the way I engage with Jews, then we can have a conversation.

I define my life as an experiment. Many attempts have been made in the past 20 years to bridge the divide between Jews and Muslims, but the two communities are far more polarized than ever. So there's room for trying a new experiment. If you don't like how I do it, give me an alternative. Tell me a better way to do it.

“When people criticize me for talking to Zionists, I say: What’s your alternative?”

Can you say what Muslim participants in the MLI program get out of the program? What kinds of things are learned?

Everyone's experience is unique, but there are some common threads. The program shows that human interaction is a key to undermining stereotypes about the other. Through human interaction you can disarm people and find how much you share with someone, despite political disagreement. A little bit of an education about the other, a modest attempt at seeing the world the way that someone else experiences it—that goes a long way.

People also see the power of an act of good will. The overwhelming majority of Muslim Americans support a two-state

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Master of Divinity student Sterling Lynk says he “felt called [to ministry] for as long as I can remember, but I had not faithfully responded.” He took a circuitous career route before arriving at Luther Seminary. To balance work, family and school, he combines aspects of being a residential student at the seminary with the flexibility of online classes.



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solution in Israel/Palestine. But it is one thing to say that and another thing actually to go to Israel and study Judaism. It is putting your money where your mouth is, proving your sincerity in seeking a solution. It's incredible how much good will is created in the Jewish community by such an act.

A strategy I would like to explore is getting Jews, Christians, and Muslims together to do things, not just say things—to give examples of working together. That will indirectly solve the many problems we are trying to tackle.

What is the biggest misunderstanding about Islam that you encounter?

That's a very painful subject to speak about so soon after the presidential election. Just as many Muslims see Jews and Zionism as a monolithic reality, many people in American society see Islam as a monolithic reality. They believe all Muslims are terrorists, that Islam is evil. The simplistic and hateful rhetoric has been repeated enough times that many Americans have swallowed this propaganda.

Whatever we have been doing about this since 9/11—and Muslim Americans have done a huge amount to address this misperception—is not working for certain segments of American society. We need some new strategies. Muslims can spend 20 hours a day condemning terrorism and saying it does not represent Islam, and it won't matter as long as the majority of the society can't hear or is not willing to listen.

It's important that faith communities, civic organizations, and political parties respond to the rise of hate. People are fooling themselves if they think bigotry will be confined to Muslims or that it is Muslims' responsibility alone to respond to it. The cancer spreads if it goes unchallenged. If bigotry against Muslims grows any further, it can ruin the foundation of the United States as a multicultural, multireligious society.

What sustains you day-to-day in this work? Where you get your inspiration?

As an American Muslim, I have a million reasons to feel discouraged. But one of the central teachings of Islam is that losing hope is equivalent to denying the existence of God. Despair is unbelief. What sustains me is an unshakeable belief in the God who is involved in every aspect of history.

When I see how Jewish-Christian reality changed from the time of the Holocaust to having a Jewish presidential candidate in the United States in 2016—and his Jewish identity is not even talked about—and when I see the relative success in eliminating homophobia, racism, sexism, and misogyny, I believe we have come a long way. By no means are these complete victories. But I see God's fingerprints in the relative successes of the struggles of the past. So I have absolute confidence that the God of love and mercy and compassion will work through humanity and we shall overcome this bigotry.

—David Heim

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Devotional Writing: An Online Workshop

by Stephanie Paulsell

Mysteries in the edgelands

I GREW UP in a neighborhood on the edge of town, built next to fields and woods. A few streets over, a friend's house backed onto a soybean field, giving her backyard a feeling of endlessly stretching toward the horizon. My family's backyard lay flush against our neighbor's—but beyond the neighbor's house lay what we all called “the woods.” The woods were the frontier of my childhood. They remain alive in my memory, their geography etched into my mind's eye by years of exploration.

The woods began where our neighbor's street dead-ended. My friends and I were often exploring the dense, pathless parts and passing silently over pine needle-carpeted paths that had been stamped into the ground by bicycle tires and feet. One trail took us to a bright, sandy path that wound in a circle around a tangle of trees; our bike tires would hiss as they hit it. We learned to avoid the sandy patches that would yank our bikes out from under us, to pick our way through briars, to navigate the ditches.

The woods were full of mysteries and shivered with the sound of living things rustling just out of sight. Once I brought home some fuzzy, gray-green stalks, put them in a jar of water in my room, and woke the next morning to find caterpillars all over my bed. Just thinking of this brings back the startled sensation—the boundary between the realms of outside and inside had mysteriously dissolved overnight.

Thanks to Rob Cowen's remarkable book *Common Ground: Encounters with Nature at the Edges of Life*, I've learned that there's a word for my woods: *edgelands*. A British nature writer, Cowen celebrates not remote slices of paradise but the wild places accessible to all of us: the unregulated land at the edges of human habitation where nature has been left to its own devices. Or, as Cowen puts it, “the inglorious fallow patches you find at the fringes of the everyday.”

Cowen brings reverent attention to an edgeland near his home in the north of England. He writes about sleeping in it, pulling it as close to his body as he can. He documents its small beauties—a queen ant climbing up a faded dandelion leaf, her wings folded at her sides—and its monumental ones—the deer that leaps over him as he lies in a hollow beneath a tree.

Cowen's loving descriptions of the lives he encounters in the edgeland spill over into imaginative stories about those lives. He imagines a deer waking up to the scent of dogs in the air and tasting the danger on its tongue. He captures the way being in a wild place gives a teenager access to the possibility of mystery. He conjures the final moments of a fox, trapped in

barbed wire, its mind returning to its den before everything goes black.

Cowen's literary approach to the edgeland grows out of a deep moral imagination and a desire to understand the lives being lived so near to him. He writes that even thinking about the edgeland changes him. He cultivates his solidarity with creatures that are losing their habitats and with species being driven out of existence by tracking the lives of plants and animals. His daily engagement with the edgeland also nurtures his resistance to government officials who have deliberately obscured the catastrophe of climate change for the sake of short-term financial gain. The edgelands don't lie or spin; they declare what is happening in the world and give us a glimpse of both the past and the future.

As people of faith we can learn from these “inglorious patches” where new ecosystems take root and flourish. Cowen's account of his sustained engagement with the Yorkshire edgelands sounds a lot like what sustained engage-

The edgelands are a living witness to the overlooked sacred in our midst.

ment with a church can offer: a sense of shared history with life in all its forms, an understanding of what it means to be human that is grounded in a web of connections with each other, the enlargement of our capacity to imagine and care about lives different from ours.

At the dead ends of the places where human beings build and dwell and work and consume, the natural world has risen up and reestablished itself in edgelands. They offer a close-up view of emerging ways of living. They show us how new relationships can take shape at unexpected intersections and move us to learn the practices that sustain these relationships. They open us to the hidden presence that permeates the world with a sense of something more near at hand—the “living power,” as Gandhi put it, “that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates.” Hiding in plain sight, the edgelands are a living witness to the overlooked sacred in our midst. They challenge us to do the same in our communities.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

Decline and rise

by Christian Scharen

One of the most significant shifts in theological education in the United States over the past 50 years, Justo González argues, is the entrance of large numbers of people of color into seminaries. This claim is important because the time is approaching when the United States will not have a single racial or ethnic majority. Strikingly, the white population will lose its majority position for the first time since the nation's founding. González is clear-eyed about the fact that the traditional white establishment churches and their institutions of theological education largely look at these changes and see a crisis. However, he argues, it's not a crisis for the wider enterprise of theological education.

González, who is a professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary, exemplifies these shifts. He tells about his own experience as a graduate student and then young faculty member with no Hispanic colleagues and access to few books in Spanish or on the history of Hispanic Christians in the Americas. Now, to his delight, there are more scholars of color—and more organizations, journals, books, and conferences produced by these scholars—than he can keep up with. A study by the Association of Theological Schools reveals that the percentage of racial or ethnic minority students enrolled in ATS-accredited schools has grown from 16 percent to nearly 30 percent in the past 20 years. Numbers of racial or ethnic minority faculty have doubled in that same period.

In González's view, the fate of churches and their related seminaries can be divided according to formal patterns of required ministerial education. Denominations that traditionally required semi-

nary education for ordination face declining membership (and their seminaries are largely seeing declining enrollment as well). Those that generally have not required seminary education—especially but not only the Pentecostal traditions—are growing. Thousands of ministers are being licensed or ordained for ministry without formal theological education, and when they do seek it out, it is likely in the form of nondegree programs from alternative institutions. As a consequence, González argues, the practical monopoly of ATS-accredited schools and programs has decreasing power.

For traditional seminaries and divinity schools, circumstances require the “total reorientation and redefinition of the theological studies and ministerial training.” A looming justice question is the “anomaly” regarding resources available to white students versus students of color, with the vast majority of available resources “in terms of faculty, libraries, buildings, endowments, and so forth available mostly to a declining student population.”

Given these trends, the future of the theological education can be viewed as either dim or bright. It's dim if we only look at how traditional schools are now organized, but it's bright if we consider a wider view of the diverse settings in which religious leaders are trained—what González calls the “continuum” from congregational catechesis to university endowed chairs.

The Episcopal Church exemplifies the precipitous decline among traditional European-origin churches. Over the past 50 years it has lost 50 percent of its membership, and in the last decade, nearly 20 percent, signaling an accelerating pace of decline. And those who are

The History of Theological Education

By Justo L. González

Abingdon, 176 pp., \$39.99 paperback

still members tend to have a looser connection. According to a recent Pew study, only 3 percent of Episcopal Church members claim a high level of commitment and participation. Catholic and evangelical traditions have also experienced declines among their white American membership.

Of course, some mainline congregations are growing rather than declining. Sociologist Kirk Hadaway reports that even among Episcopal congregations, at least 20 percent are growing. While these gains do not offset the losses elsewhere, they are important sources of wisdom about navigating ministry in a fast-changing religious context.

Even more important to note is the growth among nonmainline traditions. The Assembly of God is a fast-growing Pentecostal movement born in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the early decades of the 20th century. Over the same 50-year period in which the Episcopal Church declined from around 3.6 to 1.8 million members, the AG in the United States grew from 572,123 to just over 3 million. Its global growth has been equally remarkable, with a worldwide membership of nearly 68 million, mak-

Christian Scharen is vice president of applied research and leads the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Seminary. He is coauthor, with Sharon Miller, of the report Bright Spots in Theological Education: Hopeful Stories in Times of Crisis and Change.



ing it the fourth largest Christian communion globally (just below the Anglicans at 85 million) and the largest Pentecostal church by far. Its growth in the United States has been fueled by Latinos, with current estimates claiming that as many as 600,000 Latinos join the AG per year (many from nominal Catholic membership).

Traditional mainline church-related seminaries are struggling along with their churches. Over the past decade, the ten Episcopal seminaries have declined in overall enrollment by almost 30 percent. General Theological Seminary in New York, the oldest of the ten, has experienced a 66 percent decline, was forced to sell off portions of its historic lower Manhattan campus, and teetered on the brink of closing in 2014. Across the more than 250 schools accredited by ATS, the M.Div. is in steady decline (7 percent over the last five years). Yet other degrees and certificates offered by seminaries are on the rise. In these same schools, academic and professional M.A.

degrees have grown 5 percent and 7 percent respectively over the past five years.

There is also a world of theological education outside the ATS member schools, especially serving immigrants from the Global South. The oldest Latino Pentecostal school for ministry, the Latin American Bible Institute (LABI College), and its sister organization, the Latin American Theological Seminary, both in La Puente, California, offer a range of certificate and degree programs on campus and through a broad web of extension sites in the United States and Mexico as well as online. Many of their students are bivocational and already in ministry, either lay or ordained, when they seek out theological education. These ministers are seeking deeper knowledge and skills for ministries in which they are already immersed, and which they usually continue to lead throughout the course of their studies.

González helped found the Asociación para La Educación Teológica Hispánica, now led by Fernando A. Cascante,

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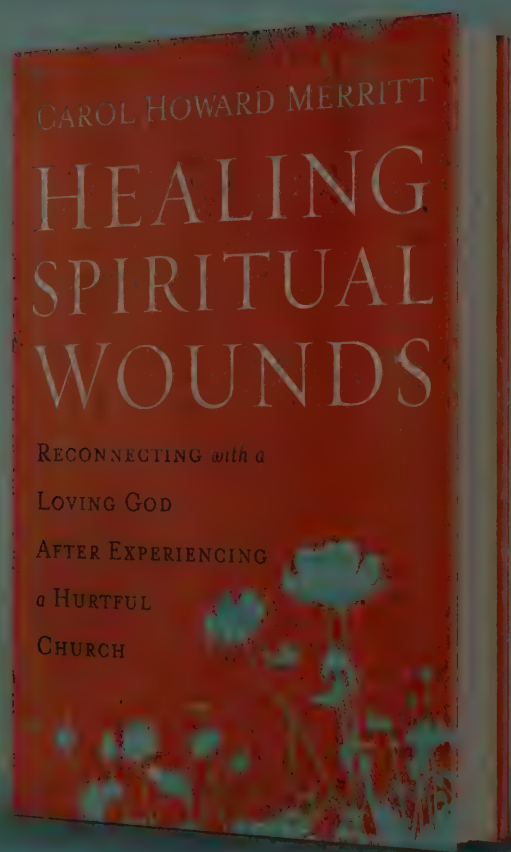
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which supports and expands the model of community-based, contextual theological education that is the hallmark of Bible institute education. Such an approach offers a way for other theological schools to rethink both curricular structure and pedagogy, which too often separate course work from the practice of ministry, saved till after graduation and denominational certification.

The slight size of *The History of Theological Education* belies its significance. González is a master of sources spanning 2,000 years of theological education. He is also attuned to the acute challenges facing the church. His wisdom as a historian and leading Hispanic theologian gives him astute perspective on what is to come. Theological education, widely conceived, is not in crisis. It is vibrant and growing. The question is: Will those who see only crisis have the imagination and courage to make changes that align with what God is doing in this time?

Until There Is Justice: The Life of Anna Arnold Hedgeman

By Jennifer Scanlon
Oxford University Press, 352 pp., \$34.95

Black Women's Christian Activism: Seeking Social Justice in a Northern Suburb

By Betty Livingston Adams
NYU Press, 240 pp., \$55.00

These two books expand our understanding of black women's activism and their attendant democratic visions. Both make important contributions to black freedom studies, a growing sub-field of American history.

Anna Arnold Hedgeman (1899–1990) was a teacher, political operative, and

Reviewed by Sarah Azaransky, who teaches social ethics at Union Theological Seminary.



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organizer best known as the only woman on the planning team for the 1963 March on Washington. She had engaged in decades of movement work before the march: she led black YWCA chapters in Ohio, New Jersey, and New York in the 1920s; teamed up with A. Philip Randolph and his budding March on Washington movement in the 1930s; and worked in politics—in the New York City mayor's office, and in the federal government lobbying on behalf of the Fair Employment Practices Committee in the 1940s. Indeed, Hedgeman's life provides a view of the decades of organizing that preceded what Bayard Rustin would later call the "classical" phase of the civil rights movement, from 1955 to 1965. When Martin Luther King Jr. was still a child, Hedgeman was among a cadre of black women and men who developed the networks and strategies that provided the groundwork for King's movement.

Jennifer Scanlon illumines Hedgeman's feminist contributions (she was among the founders of the National

Organization for Women), showing that for Hedgeman and her colleagues, issues of race and sex were never separate. To be a black woman means being black in a different way than for a black man, and to be a black woman means being a woman in a different way than for a white woman. For all people, Scanlon shows, race is sexualized and sex is racialized.

A biography of Hedgeman was long overdue, and Scanlon's work confirms that Hedgeman has much to teach us today. Hedgeman's decades-long commitment to coalition building anticipates the kinds of political organizing needed today. Furthermore, Hedgeman was notable for her willingness to listen and learn from younger Black Power activists, and she encouraged her colleagues to do the same. Intergenerational organizing remains rare in progressive circles.

Scanlon, a professor of gender and women's studies, is careful to note the limitations Hedgeman experienced despite her prodigious talent. "Hedgeman could easily draw a crowd of five hun-

dred when she gave a speech, but it too often failed to translate into other kinds of power." Scanlon also notes that Hedgeman was among a group of activist women who did not have children or conventional marriages. I wish she had included more about what this might have meant for these women in terms of sexual and gender roles.

Black Women's Christian Activism examines turn-of-the-century Summit, New Jersey, a crucial site in the black freedom struggle. Betty Livingston Adams follows the fascinating careers of Violet Johnson (1870–1939) and Florence Spearling Randolph (1866–1951), black women born in the South following emancipation, who traveled to New York City to find work. Johnson moved to New Jersey with her employer, for whom she was a live-in maid. Livingston Adams points out that poor women, often women of color (then as now), enabled suburban life to flourish by providing services in housekeeping and child care.

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When Johnson arrived in New Jersey in 1897 she started a Bible study that, within a year, became the first Baptist church in the area. According to Livingston Adams, Johnson's church shows how "white middle class migration to the suburbs expanded the geography of black women's labor and, concomitantly, the ecclesiastical reach of black Protestants."

Randolph arrived in Summit in 1925 with an appointment to lead an AME Zion congregation. Licensed as an evangelist, she was revered for her preaching ability. A protégé of Eli George Biddle, former Civil War chaplain and Yale-trained classicist, Randolph brought to Summit holiness evangelism and became one of the few women to be ordained an elder and given full responsibility for leading a church.

This book is a primer in progressive religion of the era. Johnson and Randolph were active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and they lobbied for affordable housing. Johnson

founded a settlement house for black women workers. Johnson, Randolph, and other black women of the era created religious and political platforms for themselves when most such venues were restricted to white males. Livingston Adams skillfully deploys many kinds of histories—labor, medical, economic—to demonstrate how "twentieth century suburban segregation was no accident."

Neither Scanlon nor Livingston Adams is trained in theology or religious studies, and the claims each makes about their subjects' religious arguments beg for further elaboration. Scanlon notes Hedge- man's conviction that Jesus "was an active God who supported political and civic activism, and she felt a need to share her revolutionary inspiration with others," but misses how Hedgeman was part of a centuries-long black theological tradition that testifies to how God is active in the world and that the gospel demands justice in the here and now for the poor and rejected. (Hedgeman's contemporary Benjamin Mays offers a compelling account of this

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black American tradition of God-talk in his 1939 *The Negro's God as Reflected His Literature*.) An important part of what Scanlon misses, then, is that Hedgeman's Christianity was particularly a black Christianity.

Largely missing from Livingston Adams's account is analysis of religious history and the theological content of the women's activism, speaking, and preaching. Although the book includes one of Randolph's prayers, it neglects sermons, speeches, and other public pronouncements by Randolph and Johnson. Thus, readers miss what may be important details of these two women's religious and democratic visions.

Regardless, readers who care about American religion and democracy have much to glean from these books, which document how black women have shaped the social, political, and religious landscapes. Both depict black women as authors and agents of democratic change and as innovative theological thinkers and religious leaders.

On Living

By Kerry Egan

Riverhead Books, 224 pp., \$24.00

Hospice chaplain Kerry Egan asks, "What could hope possibly look like to someone who is dying?" She then answers, "It can mean anything. It could look like everything." In Egan's narrative, hope takes many shapes: stories that matter enough to be retold after the storyteller's death, lives that have meaning and purpose even in suffering, and redemption from shame and regrets.

Amid anecdotes and insights from 15 years of ministry with the dying, Egan recounts multiple scenarios in which people ask her what a chaplain actually does. The book is filled with partial answers: a chaplain creates sacred space, offers spiritual guidance, talks to patients about their families, and surrounds patients with love. "Some chaplains might also be



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priests and pastors, but in their roles as chaplains, they don't preach or teach. Instead they create a space—a sacred time and place—in which people can look at the lives they've led and try to figure out what it all means to them." Egan's book, too, creates such a space for its readers.

This space asks its inhabitants to find a perspective that ends in love rather than critical theories. Egan's prose is not ideologically heavy. It's the kind of wisdom that might comfort someone experiencing a pain, suffering loss, or facing death. While belief systems may be filled with arguments and theories, Egan's perspective is more forgiving, softer, and grayer.

Such a space is important, because people are naturally inclined to turn away from death. Sitting with death means facing it. By showing how she sits with death, Egan helps reveal what we might be afraid to face.

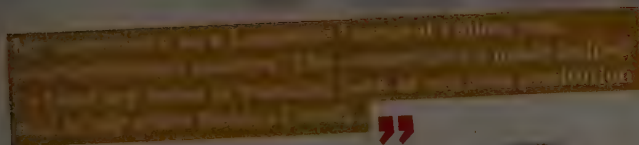
Louise, for example, does not want to die before her children are "saved." Egan admits that she wants to say there are various ways to understand salvation, but "that's not what a chaplain does," she writes. "A chaplain is there to help you figure out what you believe, what gives you comfort, the meaning of your life, who God is to you. Not to [the chaplain]." Instead of critiquing Louise's theology, she asks, "What was it like? The day you were saved?" For many patients, reflecting on their own salvation replaces fear with comforting awe. The hope Egan draws out in these encounters is relational. It relies on the question "How have you experienced God?"

When one of Egan's divinity school professors once asked what she did as a

Reviewed by Jera Brown, who is finishing an MFA in creative nonfiction at Columbia College Chicago.



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student chaplain, she responded that she talked to patients about their families. He retorted, "If I was ever sick in a hospital, if I was ever dying . . . the last person I would want to see is some student chaplain wanting to talk to me about my family."

But Egan stands by her answer. "The meaning of our lives cannot be found in books or lecture halls or even churches or synagogues. It's discovered through acts of love. . . . We learn about God when we learn about love. The first, and usually the last, classroom of

love is the family." Talking about one's family can be a profoundly theological task.

The chaplain also guides patients and their families toward comfort and self-acceptance. This is accomplished through the difficult practice of facing suffering head-on without judging it. Egan tells the story of Gloria, who is afraid her son won't understand why she almost gave him up as a baby. Another lonely patient, Reggie, regrets much of the violence he caused in his life and worries about dying without making amends.

Egan regards flinching—turning away from suffering—as a form of judging. And she admits that at times in her hospice work she has flinched. "If you think it's not work to stay steady, to remain present, to not pull back in the face of terrible suffering, then you have never been in the face of terrible suffering. It's something I've failed at . . . I try not to run away. But I have."

But countless other times, she hasn't. To live unflinchingly is to see that in the face of pain there's always hope—for redemption, forgiveness, acceptance, or the existence of something beyond the pain. This practice is a way of life, an ethos that she calls "living in the gray." It involves choosing to view others' actions and identities with empathy. "It is understanding that we never know all the layers in a life." Living in the gray is not weak or gullible; it is forgiving and brave.

Egan also finds healing for herself. She writes about her own emergency C-section for her first child. The operation led to a drug-induced psychotic disorder that lasted for seven months. She struggled with the shame of not being present during much of her child's first year and with the lasting effects of the terror, isolation, and misunderstanding she endured during that time. Egan writes that facing her patients' guilt and shame without flinching has helped her learn to do the same for herself.

This book is modestly written. Egan's prose is not particularly aphoristic or lyrical. The book's strengths are its characters, and the vulnerability and wisdom of the author.



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In the Not Quite Dark: Stories

By Dana Johnson

Counterpoint, 225 pp., \$16.95 paperback

Reading the short stories in Dana Johnson's new collection, I was surprised to find myself repeatedly asking the same question about the characters: What race are they? It's a question I rarely ask of fiction: I generally assume that the characters I read about are white unless I'm told otherwise. When fictional characters are black or Latino or Asian, it's easy for me to see that a particular moment, dialogue, or encounter is about race. But with this book, I found myself wondering if race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are a factor in the narrative—and if so, how large a factor.

In "The Liberace Museum," Heath is a white, wealthy southern man whose home feels to his girlfriend Charlotte like a plantation house where her ancestors might have been slaves. Charlotte

comments on the house, saying, "All that are missing are the darkies." Heath, missing the irony, replies that people appreciate the house because it keeps them close to their history. He cannot see what is obvious to readers: that the full history of his house evokes not nostalgia but complex feelings related to slavery and current race relations.

At dinner Charlotte painstakingly works to meet the expectations of her hosts, even "sweeping her braids into a bun so that the Bolingers wouldn't have to puzzle over her hair." She knows that she is expected to "fold into any fabric" and "never call attention to the fact that any work was being done at all. It was automatic, yet exhausting, like a dancer's hundredth performance in a Vegas show." Heath is oblivious to her struggle. "You were great, honey," he later says. "You always make everyone feel so comfortable."

Reviewed by Melissa Earley, who is the pastor of Northbrook United Methodist Church in Northbrook, Illinois. She blogs at Waking Up Earley.

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The disparity in their lived experience is clearest when they go out to lunch in Las Vegas. Charlotte is worried that they aren't dressed right, that she isn't right. After requesting a table while Heath parks the car, she waits while group after group is seated before her. She worries that she's not being seated because she's

black. Then she worries that she's reading too much into the situation. When Heath enters and the hostess seats them, he says, "The way you carry on sometimes. You walk in, you sit down, honey. It's that easy."

But we know that it's not that easy. Like Charlotte, we're left wondering

about the significance of her race. And then we wonder whether we should be wondering about it. I confess I've been slow to understand the dilemma posed by microaggressions, those denigrating or dismissive comments that someone from the dominant culture makes against someone in a different group. Often the person making such a comment doesn't see it as insulting, and the comment may even be well-intended. But in reading Johnson's stories, I get it. A microaggression leaves the recipient wondering, "Would you have said that to me if I were white?" Or a man? Or straight? Or if English were my first language? It's the wondering that causes the damage.

Johnson expertly shows how proximity does not automatically breed understanding or insight. Two people can simultaneously share an experience and have completely different experiences. Most of the stories take place in a gentrifying area of Los Angeles where haves and have-nots, longtime residents and new occupants, run into each other like bumper cars at a carnival. Those who consider themselves liberal often think that if we all just got to know each other, all our troubles with race, age, class, and gender would melt away. Johnson shows that it's not that easy.

In fact, nothing in Johnson's stories is easy. "Because That's Just Easier" tells the story of Frida, Jackson, and their young daughter Dakota, who move from

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the suburbs to downtown Los Angeles because Jackson wants to live “in the middle of the ‘people.’” While Jackson commutes to his office in Santa Monica, Frida negotiates daily urban life with Dakota. It’s good to live downtown, says Frida’s sister from the safety of her college-life bubble. Not only are you near museums and the library, but it’s good to see suffering because “it makes us more empathetic.”

But Frida knows this is not true. “You could see and then push those images out of your brain almost immediately,” she reflects. “But the lingering horror, the terror at seeing people suffer things that no human being should have to suffer alone, so visible and invisible at the same time? In, like, herds. That’s what they called them on that show that Jackson liked so much”—a show about zombies. When Dakota stumbles into her parents watching the show one night and comments that the zombies are like the people on the street, Jackson insists on explaining the difference between homeless people and zombies.

It soon becomes clear who the real zombies are. When they go out for ice cream, the family sees a man squatting with his pants around his ankles. Jackson passes by, but Frida stops, shocked by the sight of a man defecating on the sidewalk. As Frida becomes aware that her daughter is seeing what she’s seeing, she makes a choice.

At that moment, Frida decided to die, just a little. Turn everything off. She did it for Dakota. She didn’t want to scare her. She made her eyes dead, so they looked at nothing. She stopped breathing, so she smelled nothing. Her ears heard nothing. . . . And everyone around her, so many people, the people going to lunch, to work, for coffee, for drinks, had the same look of death in their eyes, looking straight ahead, everyone catching the same thought as they walked past the man. Keep walking. Just keep walking.

On their way home from the ice cream store, the family passes a man lying in the middle of the sidewalk. Dakota asks if he’s dead, and when she’s assured that he’s not, she wants to help

him. Jackson explains the complexities of helping: one act of kindness may lead to another and you can’t help everyone.

Johnson finishes many of her stories with loose ends, little strings that I want to tug to see what happens. Instead of offering a satisfying finish that lets us push back from the table of her writing

satiated, she leaves us wanting more, wrestling with how we finish the story ourselves. Much like Jesus’ parables, the point isn’t to find a pithy moment of clarity. It’s to find ourselves smack in the middle of a dilemma—in the not quite dark—where we can only grope our way out.



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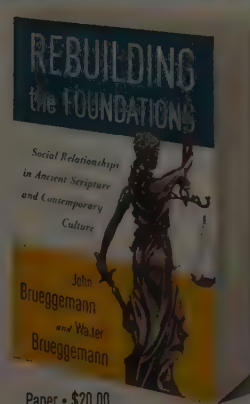
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Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

By Christiane Tietz; translated
by Victoria J. Barnett

Fortress, 132 pp., \$23.99 paperback

This slim biography is concise and unemotional. It delves into the details of Bonhoeffer's thought alongside the basic narrative of his life, showing how he functioned as a theologian and ethicist during a time of unprecedented political and social crisis. Sparse attention is given to Bonhoeffer's personal relationships, and readers are discouraged from romanticized speculation. The book focuses instead on how he strove to connect faith, politics, and action. In a final chapter focused on Bonhoeffer's reception over the past decades, Tietz warns against appropriating him for contemporary political or social causes. Nevertheless, the witness of his life and thought speaks to our time.

Of Poetry and Protest: From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin

Edited and compiled by Philip Cushway
and Michael Warr

Norton, 224 pp., \$21.95 paperback

"There is no wound of exit. A black boy can fold his body around a bullet. The cartridge is a pinpoint of craving, a sort of little love, some slugs are warmer than mothers," writes Patricia Smith in her exegesis of the medical examiner's report for a black teenage boy whose body lies in the morgue. "The face is unremarkable. Correction: The black face is suppressed fireworks." The poems and essays in this anthology, written by 43 African-American poets, push against the assumptions that have built a culture of violence against black men. Full-page candid photographs of the poets are juxtaposed with their words and historic photos and artwork reflecting the history of black Americans' struggles. The result is a stunning collection of beauty and protest.



Two visions of creativity

Damien Chazelle's film *La La Land* is sweeping the award circuit with its whimsical dream-escape. It's a quintessentially Hollywood movie about following one's dreams to LA and stardom.

The greatest compliment that can be paid to anyone in *La La Land* is to call that person a dreamer. In the opening scene, young performers who are stuck in traffic leap out of their cars to sing about their dreams of making it in Hollywood. The magnificent performance boasts vaudeville soft-shoe, hip-hop, and break dance, all sweeping the viewer into the film's kinetic energy.

The story is not new: boy meets girl, hardship follows, dreams are lost, and dreams are fulfilled. But the characters often erupt into song and dance, a device that reminds us that dreamers move through life at a different speed, with a song always at the back of their throats. Chazelle wants to recall a time when movies delighted and overwhelmed the senses with spectacle and skill. *La La Land* does: it's an airy confection of delight that is at the same time wised-up and nostalgic. And it aims for a vision of moviemaking that is rhapsodic and earnest without being sentimental.

Set across the country in New Jersey, Jim Jarmusch's movie *Paterson* also explores the creative life, but with a very different vision for how it unfolds. The movie is as far from *La La Land* in tone and style as it is in its setting. *Paterson*, the main character (Adam Driver), drives a city bus. We follow him on his route every day for a week as he overhears conversations between passengers and watches the hours pass slowly. We also see that on his lunch break or in the few quiet moments before his route begins he writes poems in a small, paperbound notebook.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.

The movie is a visual and narrative masterpiece. The landscape conveys the character of the town, its history, and the inner life of its inhabitants. The rich dialogue makes one feel as if one knows the characters, even those who only pass momentarily across the screen. Like *Paterson* turning a line of poetry over in his head as he drives, we viewers can reflect on this movie for weeks.

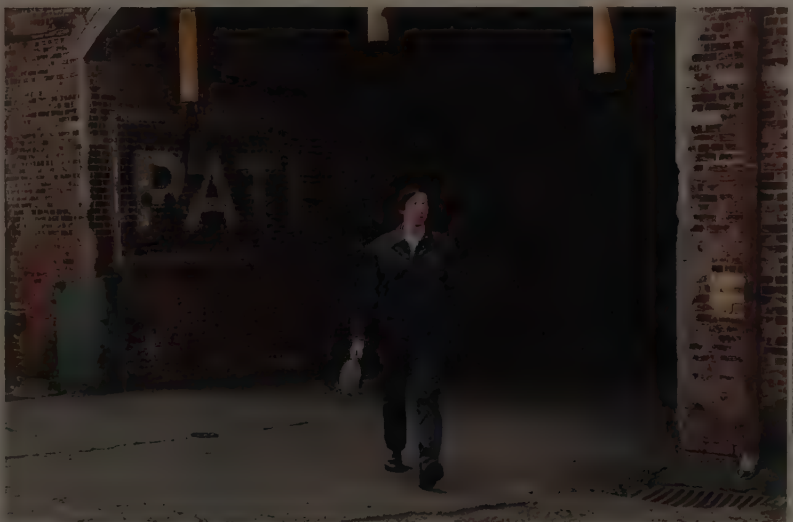
Many stories about artists veer into cliché: the artist as the solitary genius who toils in obscurity until her brilliance is revealed or the artist as a rebel resisting life's comforts in order to create bold new works that outlast him.

La La Land relies on these clichés and cannot deliver on them. The climactic song celebrates "the rebels / The ripples from pebbles / The painters, and poets, and plays." But in the end, the dream is only of fame and glitz: having a full-time nanny and attending industry parties. The artist turns into the movie star.

Paterson sidesteps these clichés. Even though he organizes his entire life around writing poetry, *Paterson* doesn't call himself a poet. He does not share his work with anyone except his partner. There is no hint that he will one day be discovered or even that he would want to be.

His poetry cannot be separated from the mundane realities of driving buses and cooking dinner, yet his poetry and the rest of his life are not the same. Artistic creation uses daily life as fodder for its work. It doesn't denigrate the ordinary as something that has to be left behind. Instead, the work of making art transforms life and elevates it. This is the movie's most enticing suggestion: that creating is a necessity of life, like working and eating and loving.

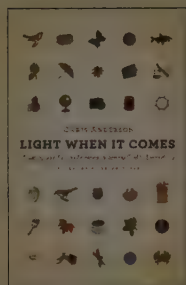
In stories of artistic creation, delight and escapism have their place, and *La La Land* is good for that. But for a vision of creativity that smolders in every fiber of one's life, I'd choose New Jersey over LA anytime.



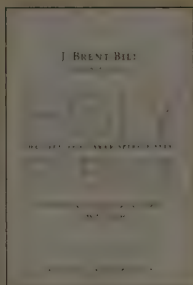
ELEVATING THE ORDINARY: Adam Driver plays *Paterson*, a poet who drives a bus and harvests lines of poetry from the passengers he sees and hears.

PHOTO BY MARY CYRILSKI / AMAZON STUDIOS & ILLUSTRATION

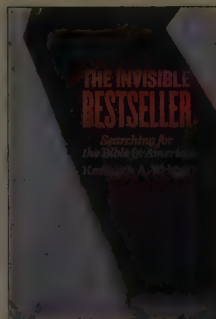
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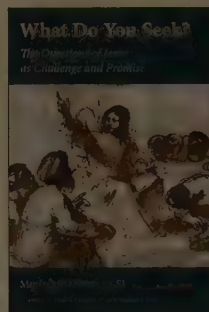
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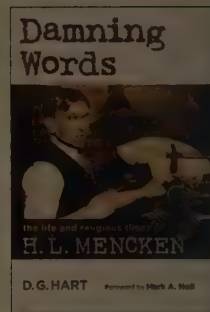
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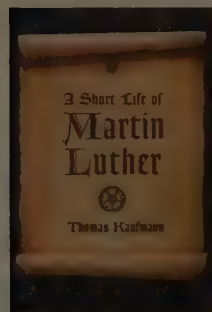
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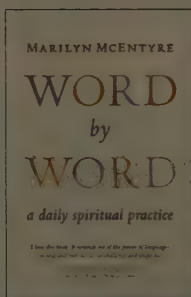
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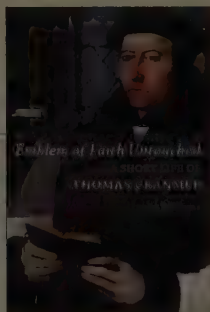
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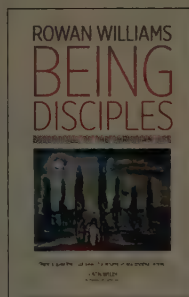
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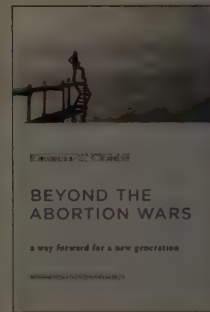
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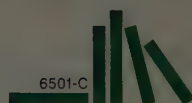
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by Philip Jenkins

notes from the GLOBAL CHURCH

Many viewers of Martin Scorsese's magnificent film *Silence* may come away with a deeply pessimistic opinion of a nearly modern Catholic missions in Asia. For all their heroism and sacrifice, we surely think, those missionaries—especially the Jesuits—were pursuing a nearly impossible goal in seeking to bring a distinctly European form of the faith to ancient and profoundly alien Asian cultures. How could they hope to comprehend those other worlds, still less make an impact? We might find ourselves muttering Rudyard Kipling's words about East and West, how "never the vain shall meet."

Certainly, some Jesuit missionaries met dreadful fates, but others were astonishingly successful, and in precisely those areas of intercultural contact that we might expect to have been most difficult. The Jesuits were, above all, phenomenal linguists, and those skills made them invaluable to courts and governments around the world, even those who had little time for their religious message. In some remarkable cases, the missionaries shaped or even re-created the languages and literatures of the societies in which they operated. At many points, Jesuit influence is essential to understanding the history of Asian societies.

Alongside the martyrs of Japan who are the focus of *Silence*, we might recall their exact Jesuit contemporary

Mission in the vernacular

Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660). Born in France, he spent much of his career in the land we call Vietnam, which was then a proud imperial power, with many wealthy aristocratic families. After the collapse of the missions to Japan, the Jesuit order made Indochina its next primary target, and de Rhodes was among the leaders of that effort. He plunged wholeheartedly into learning Vietnamese language, history, and culture, although run-ins with local lords repeatedly forced him into exile. Narrowly escaping a death sentence, he found himself unable to return to Vietnam. He died a little short of his seventieth year, while beginning a whole new missionary career—in Persia!

But de Rhodes's contributions to the Vietnamese world were enormous, including a scholarly grammar and a Vietnamese-Latin-Portuguese dictionary. He helped shape the writing of the Vietnamese language as we know it today. In his time, Vietnamese was normally written in chữ Nôm characters, adapted from Chinese. Portuguese missionaries (mainly Jesuits themselves) had, however, developed a Latin alphabet, which de Rhodes used in his work and favored for purposes of popular evangelization. His example had an overwhelming influence, and that alphabet in turn developed into the quốc ngữ (national language) script

which became standard under later French rule. If de Rhodes did not invent that system, it was his work, above all, and especially the 1651 dictionary that gave it mainstream status. The 20th-century Vietnamese nationalists who accepted and promoted that Latinized script did so with full knowledge that they were using a system devised by Jesuit Fathers. Today, quốc ngữ is the nation's common and officially sanctioned system.

De Rhodes's innovations only reached fruition long after his lifetime; other missionaries had a much more immediate impact. Among the greatest and the most remarkable was Constanzo Beschi (1680–1742), one of the many European clergy who built up the very strong Catholic presence that still flourishes in Tamil Nadu in southern India. Although Father Constanzo also faced periods of persecution, he did a splendid job of framing his faith in ways that local Tamil people would find acceptable. He dressed as a Hindu ascetic, a sanniyasi. He is often known by his Tamil name, Vīramāmunivar.

But Father Constanzo's commitment to Tamil culture went far beyond adorning new churches with a few Orientalizing frills. He thoroughly mastered Tamil language and literature to the

point of composing excellent grammars, glossaries and lexicons, and earning the title "Father of Tamil Prose." In poetry, he wrote several works that Tamil scholars still count among the classics of that language, including a vast Christian epic called the *Thembavani*, focused on the life of St. Joseph. He also translated some of the ancient Tamil writings into Latin, making European intellectuals aware of the glories of southern Indian culture. In 1968, long after India's independence from British rule, Constanzo Beschi was honored with a statue erected in Madras (Chennai), as befits a giant of Tamil literature.

Even by the demanding standards of a postimperial world, it is difficult to think of anything more that this European could have done to treat his Asian host culture with honor, and indeed love. The Christianity that Beschi preached was as thoroughly Asian as it was European, as it absolutely should have been in an area that had first encountered the faith in the first or second centuries. Never assume that multicultural sensitivity is a modern fad.

The stories of de Rhodes and Beschi remind us of missions scholar Lamin Sanneh's dictum: the original language of Christianity is translation.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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Daughter of an Irish Catholic and Bengali Muslim, by Liz Hingley

Photographer and anthropologist Liz Hingley grew up in Birmingham, United Kingdom, the daughter of two Anglican priests. In her photodocumentary series and book *Under Gods: Stories of Soho Road*, she documents the city's diverse religious communities. She cites an Asian-Anglican woman priest who observes that immigrants are more conscious of their faith than of where they came from. "People used to say, 'I am from Bangladesh, Pakistan, or Poland.' Now people say, 'I am a Muslim, I am a Sikh, I am a Hindu, I am a Catholic.'" In *Daughter of an Irish Catholic and Bengali Muslim*, a teenager in school uniform is reflected in a mirror in her home, where there are religious objects from both traditions.

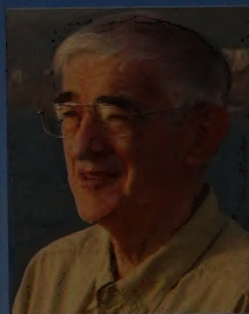
Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor.

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John Dominic Crossan is generally regarded as the leading historical Jesus scholar in the world. Educated in Ireland and the United States, he taught at DePaul University in Chicago from 1969 to 1995 and is now professor emeritus in the religious studies department. His best-selling books include *The Historical Jesus*, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, *The Birth of Christianity*, and *Who Killed Jesus?*

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